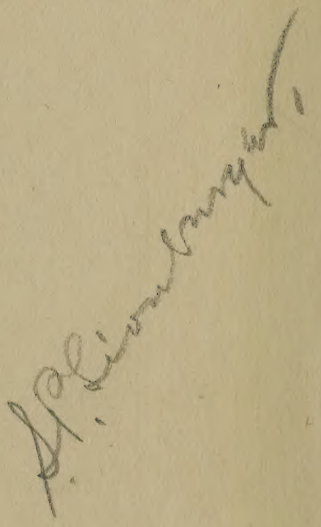
THE MAIN CHANCE

By MEREDITH NICHOLSON



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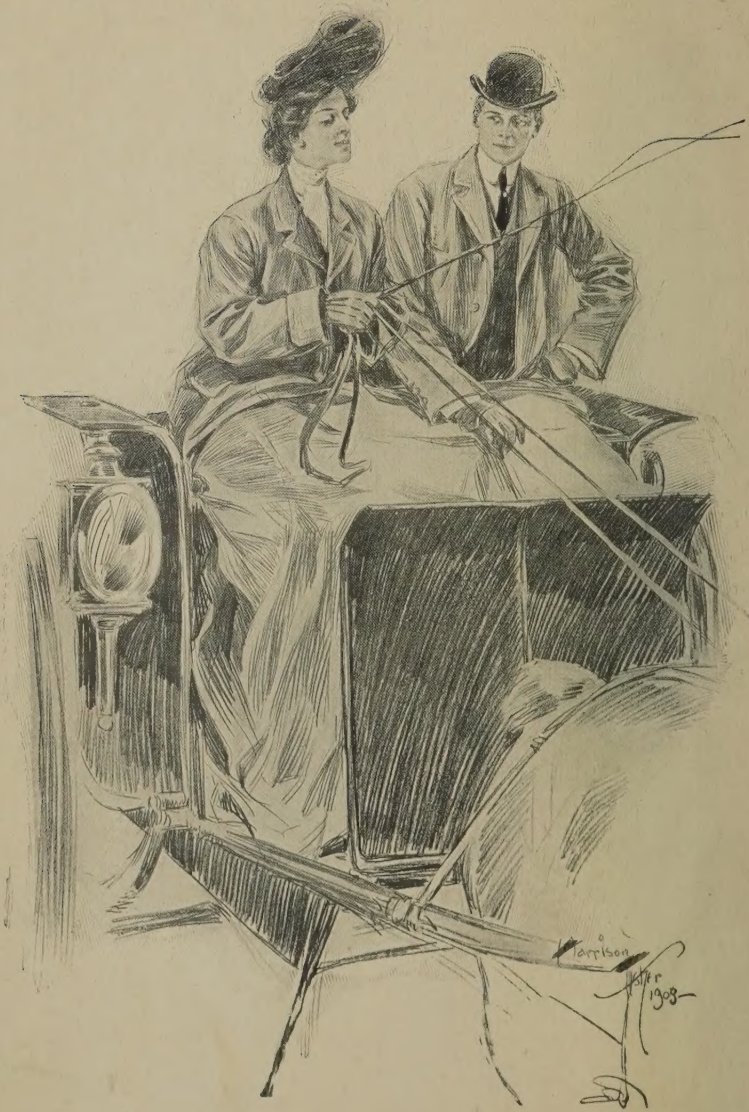
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1908

THE MAIN CHANCE

BY

MEREDITH NICHOLSON

ILLUSTRATED BY

HARRISON FISHER

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May

TO

E. K. N.

WHO WILL REMEMBER AND

UNDERSTAND

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THE MAIN CHANCE

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CHAPTER I

A NEW MAN IN TOWN

"Well, sir, they say I'm crooked!"

William Porter tipped back his swivel chair and placidly puffed a cigar as he watched the effect of this declaration on the young man who sat talking to him.

"That's said of every successful man nowadays, isn't it?" asked John Saxton.

The president of the Clarkson National Bank ignored the question and rolled his cigar from one side of his mouth to the other, as he waited for his words to make their full impression upon his visitor.

"They say I'm crooked," he repeated, with a narrowing of the eyes, "but they don't say it very loud!"

Porter kicked his heels together gently and watched his visitor with eyes in which there was no trace of humor; but Saxton saw that he was expected to laugh.

"No, sir;" the banker continued, "they don't say it very loud, and I guess they don't any of them want to have to prove it. I'm afraid those Boston friends of yours have given us up as a bad lot," he went on, waiving the matter of his personal rectitude and returning to the affairs of his visitor; "and they've sent you out

here to get their money, and I don't blame them. Well, sir; that money's got to come out in time, but it's going to take time and money to get it."

"I believe they sent me because I had plenty of time," said Saxton, smiling.

"Well, we want to help you win out," returned Porter. "And now what can I do to start you off?" he asked briskly. "Have you got a place to stay? Well, sir, I warn you solemnly against the hotels in this town; but we've got a fairly decent club up here, and you'd better stay there till you get acquainted. Been to breakfast? Breakfast on the train? That's good. Just look over the papers till I get rid of these letters and I'll be free."

Porter turned to his desk and replaced the eyeglasses which he had dropped while talking. There was an air of great alertness in his small, lean figure as he pushed buttons to summon various members of the clerical force and rapidly dictated terse telegrams and letters to a stenographer. He continued to smoke, and he shifted constantly the narrow-brimmed, red-banded straw hat that he wore above his shrewd face. It was an agreeable face to see, of a type that is common wherever the North-Irish stock is found in America, and its characteristics were expressed in his firm, lean jaw and blue eyes, and his reddish hair and mustache, through which there were streaks of gray. He wore his hair short, but it was still thick, and he combed it with precision. His clothes fitted him; he wore a bright cravat, well tied, and his shoes were carefully polished. Saxton was impressed by the banker's perfect confidence and ease; it manifested itself in the way he tapped buttons to call his subordinates, or

turned to satisfy the importunities of the desk-telephone at his elbow.

John Saxton had been sent to Clarkson by the Neponset Trust Company of Boston to represent the interests of a group of clients who had made rash investments in several of the Trans-Missouri states. Foreclosure had, in many instances, resulted in the transfer to themselves of much town and ranch property which was, in the conditions existing in the early nineties, an exceedingly slow asset. It was necessary that some one on the ground should care for these interests. The Clarkson National Bank had been exercising a general supervision, but, as one of the investors told his fellow sufferers in Boston, they should have an agent whom they could call home and abuse, and here was Saxton, a conscientious and steady fellow, who had some knowledge of the country, and who, moreover, needed something to do. Saxton's acquaintance with the West had been gained by a bitter experience of ranching in Wyoming. A blizzard had destroyed his cattle, and the subsequent depression in land values in the neighborhood of his ranch had left him encumbered with a property for which there was no market. His friends had been correct in the assumption that he needed employment, and he was, moreover, glad of the chance to get away from home, where the impression was making headway that he had failed at something in the vague, non-interest-paying West. When, on his return from Wyoming, it became necessary for his former acquaintances to identify him to one another, they said, with varying degrees of kindness, that John had gone broke at ranching; and if they liked him particularly, they said it was

too bad; if they had not known him well in his fortunate days, they mildly intimated that a fool and his money found quicker divorce at ranching than in any other way. Most of Saxton's friends and contemporaries had made good beginnings at home, and he felt, unnecessarily perhaps, that his failure made him a marked man among them.

"Now," said Porter presently, scrutinizing a telegram carefully before signing it, "I'll take you up to the office we've been keeping for your people, and show you what it looks like. Some of these things are run as corporations, you understand, and in our state corporations have to maintain a tangible residence."

"So that the sheriff may find them more easily," added Saxton.

"Well, that's no joke," returned Porter, as they entered the elevator from the outer hall; "but they don't necessarily have much office furniture to levy on."

The room proved to be a small one at the top of the building. On the ground-glass door was inscribed "The Interstate Irrigation Company." The room contained a safe, a flat-top desk and a few chairs. Several maps hung on the wall, some of them railroad advertisements, and others were engineers' charts of ranch lands and irrigation ditches.

"It ain't pretty," said Porter critically, "but if you don't like it you can move when you get ready. The bank is your landlord, and we don't charge you much for it. You've doubtless got your inventory of stuff with you, and here in the safe you'll find the accounts of these companies, copies of public records relating to them, and so on." As Porter talked he stood in the

middle of the room with his hands in his pockets, and puffed at a cigar, throwing his head back in an effort to escape the smoke. He stood with one foot on a chair and pushed his hat away from his forehead as he continued reflectively: "You're going up against a pretty tough proposition, young man. You'll hear a hard luck story wherever you go out here just now; people who owe your friends money will be mighty sorry they can't pay. Many of the ranch lands your people own will be worth something after a while. That Colorado irrigation scheme ought to pan out in time, and I believe it will; but you've got to nurse all these things. Make your principals let you alone. Those fellows get in a hurry at the wrong time,—that's my experience with Eastern investors. Tell them to go to Europe,—get rid of them for a while, and make them give you a chance to work out their money for them. They're not the only pebbles." A slight smile seemed to creep over a small area about the banker's lips, but his cigar only partly revealed it. His eyes rarely betrayed him, and the monotonous drawl of his voice was without humorous intention.

"I'll send the combination of the safe up by the boy," he said, moving toward the door, "and you can get a bird's-eye view of the situation before lunch. Mr. Wheaton, our cashier, is away to-day, but he's familiar with these matters and will be glad to help you when he gets home. He'll be back to-night. When you get stuck call on us. And drop down about twelve thirty and go up to the club for lunch. Take it easy; you can't do it all in one day," he added.

"I hope I shan't be a nuisance to you," said the

younger man. "I'm going to fight it out on the best lines I know how,—if it takes several summers."

"Well, it'll take them all right," said Porter, sententiously.

Left to himself Saxton examined his new quarters, found a feather duster hanging in a corner and brushed the dirt from the scanty furniture. This done, he drew a pipe from his pocket, filled it from his tobacco pouch and sat down by the open window, through which the breeze came cool out of the great valley; and here he could see, far over the roofs and spires of the town, the bluffs that marked the broad bed of the tawny Missouri. He was not as buoyant as his last words to the banker implied. Here he was, he reflected, a man of good education, as such things go, who had lost his patrimony in a single venture. He had been sent, partly out of compassion, he felt, to take charge of investments that were admitted to be almost hopelessly bad. The salary promised would provide for him comfortably, and that was about all; anything further would depend upon himself, the secretary of the Neponset Trust Company had told him; it would, he felt, depend much more particularly on the making over by benign powers of the considerable part of the earth's surface in which his principals' money lay hidden. As his eyes wandered to one of the office walls, the black trail of a great transcontinental railroad caught and held his attention. On one of its northern prongs lay the region of his first defeat.

"Three years of life are up there," he meditated, "and all my good dollars are scattered along the right of way." Many things came back to him vividly—how

the wind used to howl around the little ranch house, and how he rode through the snow among his dying cattle in the great storm that had been his undoing. With his eyes still resting on the map, he recurred to his early school days and to his four years at Harvard. There was a burden of heartache in these recollections. Incidents of the unconscious brutality of playmates came back to him,—the cruel candor with which they had rejected him from sports in which proficiency, and not mere strength or zeal, was essential. He had enjoyed at college no experience of success in any of those ways which mark the undergraduate for brief authority or fame. He had never been accepted for the crew nor for the teams that represented the university on diamond or gridiron, though he had always participated in athletics, and was possessed of unusual strength. None of the professions had appealed to him, and he had not heeded his father's wish that he enter the law. The elder Saxton, who was himself a lawyer of moderate success, died before John's graduation; he had lost his mother in his youth, and his only remaining relative was a sister who married before he left college.

A review of these brief and discouraging annals did not hearten him; but he fell back upon the better mood with which he had begun the morning; he had a new chance, and he proposed to make the best of it. He put aside his coat and hat, lighted the pipe which he had been holding in his hand, and opened his desk. The banker had sent up the combination of the safe, as he had promised, and Saxton began inspecting its contents and putting his office in order.

"I'm in for a long stay," he reflected. "Watson and Terrell and those other fellows are just about reaching Park Street, perhaps with virtuous thoughts of having given me a job, if they haven't forgotten me. It's probably a pleasant day in Boston, with the flowers looking their best in the Gardens; but this is better than my Wyoming pastures, anyhow." The books and papers began to interest him, and he was soon classifying the properties that had fallen to his care. He was one of those fortunate individuals who are endowed with a capacity for complete absorption in the work at hand,—the frequent possession of persons, who, like Saxton, enjoy immunity from visits of the alluring will-o'-the-wisps that beguile geniuses. He was so deeply occupied that he did not mark the flight of time and was surprised when a boy came with a message from Porter that he was ready to go to luncheon.

"You mustn't overdo the thing, young man," said the banker amiably, as he closed his desk. "Don't you adopt our Western method of working all the hours there are. I do it now because my neighbors and customers would talk about me if I didn't, and say that I had lost my grip in my old age."

They started up the sloping street, which was intensely hot.

"In my last job I worked twenty hours a day," said Saxton, "and lost money in spite of it."

"You mean up in Wyoming; the Neponset people wrote me that you were a reformed cattleman."

"Yes, I was winter-killed at the business." He assumed that Porter would not care particularly for the details of his failure. Western men are, he knew, much

more tolerant of failure than Eastern men; but he was relieved to hear the banker drawling on with a comment on Clarkson, its commercial history and prospects.

At the twentieth anniversary of the founding of the Clarkson Chamber of Commerce, the local boy orator, who made a point of quoting Holy Writ in his speeches, spoke of Clarkson as "no mean city," just as many another orator has applied this same apt Pauline phrase to many another metropolis. The business of Clarkson had to do with primary employments and needs. The cattle of a thousand hills and of many rough pastures were gathered here; and here wheat and corn from three states were assembled. In exchange for these products, Clarkson returned to the country all of the necessities and some of the luxuries of life. Several important railway lines had their administrative offices here. Ores were brought from the Rockies, from Mexico, and even from British Columbia, to the great smelters whose smoke and fumes hung over the town. Neither coal, wood nor iron lay near at hand, so that manufacturing was almost unknown; but the packing-houses and smelters gave employment to many laborers, drawn in great measure from the Slavonic races.

Varney Street cut through the town at right angles to the river, bisecting the business district. It then gradually threw off its commercial aspect until at last it was lined with the homes of most of Clarkson's wealthiest citizens. An exaggerated estimate of the value of corner lots had caused many of them to be left vacant; and weeds and signboards exercised eminent domain between booms. North and south of Varney Street were other thoroughfares which strove to be equally fash-

ionable, and here citizens had sometimes built themselves houses that were, as they said, as good as anything in Varney Street. Everywhere ragged edges remained; old unpainted frame buildings lingered in blocks that otherwise contained handsome houses. Sugar-loaf cubes of clay loomed lonesomely, with houses stranded high on their summits, where property owners had been too poor to cut down their bits of earth to conform to new levels. The clay banks were ugly, but they were doomed to remain until the next high tide of prosperity.

The Clarkson Club stood at the edge of the commercial district, and its Milwaukee brick walls rose hot and staring in the July sun as Porter and Saxton approached.

"Here we are," said Porter, leading the way into the wide hall. "We'll arrange about your business relations later. There's a very bad lunch ready upstairs, and we'll go against that first."

There were only a few men in the dining-room, seated at a round table. Porter exchanged salutations with them as he passed on to a small table at the end of the room. Those who were of his own age called Porter, "Billy," and he included them all in the careless nod of old acquaintance. Porter offered Saxton the wine card, which the young man declined with instinctive knowledge that he was expected to do so. They took the simple table d'hôte, which was, as Porter had predicted, very bad. The banker ate little and carried the burden of the conversation.

They went from the table for an inspection of the club, and arranged with the clerk in the office for a

room on the third floor, which Mr. Saxton was to have, so Porter told the clerk, until he didn't want it any more.

"It's all right about the rules," he said; "if the house committee kick about it, send them to me." They stopped in the lounging room, where the men from the round table were now talking or looking at newspapers. Porter introduced Saxton to all of them, stating in his humorous way, with variations in every case, that this was a new man in town; that victims were scarce in hard times, and that they must make the most of him. Several of the men who shook hands with Saxton were railroad officials, but nearly every line of business was represented. All seemed to wear their business consciously, and Saxton was made aware of their several employments in one way or another as he stood talking to them. He felt that their own frankness should elicit a response on his part, and he stated that he had come to represent the interests of "Eastern people,"—a phrase which, in that territory, has weight and significance. This, he thought, should be sufficiently explicit; and he felt that his interlocutors were probably appraising him with selfish eyes as a possible customer or client. However, they were very cordial, and presently he found that they were chaffing one another for his benefit, and trying to bring him within the arc of their own easy comradeship.

"If you're going with me," said Porter at his elbow, "you'd better get a move on you." But the whole group went out together, Porter leaving Saxton to the others, with that confidence in human friendliness which is peculiar to the social intercourse of men. They made

him feel their honest wish to consider him one of themselves, making a point of saying to him, as they dropped out one by one, that they hoped to see him often. Porter led the way back down Varney Street, smoking meditatively and carrying his hat in his hand. He said at the bank door: "Now you make them give you what you want at the club, and if they don't, you want to raise the everlasting Nick. I've got a house up here on Varney Street,—come up for dinner to-morrow night and we'll see if we can't raise a breeze for you. It's hotter than Suez here, and you'd better take my advice about starting in slow."

He went into the bank, leaving a trail of smoke behind him; and Saxton took the elevator for his own office.

CHAPTER II

WARRICK RARIDAN

The Clarkson Club was, during most of the day, the loneliest place in town. Only a few of the sleeping rooms were occupied regularly, and luncheon was the one incident of the day that drew any considerable number of men to the dining-room. The antlered heads of moose and elk were hung in the hall, and colored prints of English hunting scenes and bad oil portraits of several pioneers were scattered through the reading and lounging rooms. There was a room which was referred to flatteringly as the library, but its equipment of literature consisted of an encyclopedia and of novels which had been contributed by members at times coincident with housecleaning seasons at home. Clarkson business men who maintained non-resident memberships in Chicago or St. Louis clubs, said, in excusing the poor patronage of the Clarkson Club, that Clarkson was not a club town, like Kansas City or Denver, where there were more unattached men with money to spend.

Saxton was not over-sensitive, but the stiffness and hardness of the club house were not without their disagreeable impression on him as he sat at dinner toward the close of his first day in Clarkson. Two of the men to whom Porter had introduced him at noon proved to

be fellow lodgers, and they exchanged greetings with him from the table where they sat together. They unsociably read their evening papers as they ate, and left before he finished. He had lighted a cigar over his coffee, and was watching the fading colors of a brilliant sunset when a young man appeared at the door, and after a brief inspection of Saxton's back walked over to him.

"Aren't you Mr. Saxton? I thought you must be he. My name is Raridan. Don't let me break in on your meditations," he added, taking the chair which the waiter drew out for him. "I met Mr. Porter a while ago, and he adjured me on penalties that I won't name to be good to you. I don't know whether this is obeying orders,"—he broke off in a laugh,—"that depends on the point of view." He had produced a cigarette case from his pocket and rolled a white cylinder between his palms before lighting it. As the flame leaped from the match, Saxton noted the young man's thin face, his thick, curling dark hair, his slight mustache, the slenderness of his fingers. The eyes that lay back of rimless glasses were almost too fine for a man; but their gentleness and kindliness were charming.

"You are guilty of a very Christian act," Saxton said. "I was just wondering whether, after the sun had gone down behind that ridge over there, the world would still be going round."

"The world never stops entirely here," returned Raridan, "but the motion sometimes gets very slow. Mr. Porter tells me that you're to be one of us. Let me congratulate us,—and you!"

"I'm not so sure about you," rejoined Saxton. "At

my last stopping place in the West they had a way of getting rid of undesirable members of the community, and I've never got over being nervous. But that was Wyoming. I'm sure you're more civilized here."

"Not merely civilized; we are civilization! You see I'm a native, and devoted to the home sod. My father was one of the first settlers. I never knew why," he laughed again—it was a pleasant laugh—"but I've tried to live up to my duties as one of the first Caucasians born in the county. Some day I'll be exhibited at the State Fair and little children will look at me with awe and admiration."

"That makes me feel very humble. I'm almost afraid to tell you that I'm a native of Boston, with a long line of highly undistinguished and terribly conventional ancestors back of me. My father was never west of Albany; my mother was never in a sleeping-car. But I'm not a tenderfoot. I rode the initiating bronco in Wyoming through all the degrees; and a cowboy once shot at me on his unlucky day."

"Oh, your title's clear. That record gives you all the rights of a native."

Raridan waved away the waiter who had been hovering near, and who now went over to the electric switch and threatened them with light.

"That's too good to lose," Raridan said, nodding toward the west in explanation.

Warrick Raridan was, socially speaking, the most available man in the Clarkson Blue Book. He was a graduate in law who did not practise, for he had, unfortunately, been left alone in the world at twenty-six, with an income that seemed wholly adequate for his

immediate or future needs. He maintained an office, which was fairly well equipped with the literature of his profession, but this was merely to take away the reproach of his busier fellow citizens; it was not thought respectable to be an idler in Clarkson, even on reputable antecedents and established credit. But Raridan's office was useful otherwise than in providing its owner with a place for receiving his mail. It was the rendezvous for a variety of committees to which he was appointed by such unrelated bodies as the Clarkson Dramatic Club and the Diocesan Board of Missions of the Episcopal Church. He had never, by any chance, been pointed to as a model young man, but religious matters interested him sporadically, and he was referred to facetiously by his friends, when his punctilious religious observances were mentioned, as a fine type of the "cheerful Christian." He appeared every Sunday at the cathedral, which was the fashionable church in Clarkson, where he passed the plate for the alms and oblations of the well-dressed congregation; and he said of himself, with conscious humor, that he thought he did it rather well.

He was capable of quixotism of the most whimsical sort. He had, for a year, taken his meals at a cheap boarding-house in order that he might maintain two Indian boys in school. He was not at all aggrieved when, at the end of the first year, they ran away and resumed tribal relations with their brethren. He chaffed himself about it to his friends.

"It was wrong for me," he would say, "to try to pervert the tastes of those young savages. I nearly ruined my own digestion to buy them white man's

luxuries; I wore out my old clothes that they might not go naked; and all they learned was to smoke cigarettes."

It was not enough to say that Warry Raridan could lead a german or tie an Ascot tie better than any other man on the Missouri River; for he was also the best informed man in that same strenuous valley concerning the traditions of the English stage, and was a fairly good actor himself, as amateurs go. He had an almost fatal cleverness, which made him impatient of the restraints of college; and he left in his sophomore year owing to difficulties with the mathematical requirements. Good books had abounded in his father's house, and he was from boyhood a persistent, though erratic reader. He threw himself with enthusiasm into the study of the rise of monastic orders; and from this he changed lightly to the newest books on psychology. There were many ways in which he could be entertaining. He had a slight literary gift, which he cultivated for his own amusement. His humor was fine and keen, and he occasionally wrote screeds for the local papers, or mailed, apropos of something or nothing, pleasant jingles to his intimate friends.

No Clarkson hostess felt that a visiting girl had received courteous attention unless she carried home a portfolio of verses written in her honor by Warry Raridan. He gave, indeed, an impression of great frivolity, but there were people who took him seriously, and lawyers who knew him well said that he might win success in his profession if he would apply himself. He had once appeared for the people in a suit to compel the street-railway company to pave

certain streets, as provided by the terms of its franchise, and had gained his point against the best lawyers in the state. This accomplished, he refused an appointment as local counsel for a great railway, and with characteristic perverseness spent the following summer managing an open-air mission for poor children.

Saxton was greatly amused and entertained by Raridan. Even those of his fellow townsmen who did not wholly approve Warry Raridan, admitted his entertaining qualities; and Saxton, who was painfully conscious of his own shortcomings and knew that he had not usually been considered worth cultivating, found himself responding with unwonted lightness to Raridan's inconsequential talk. Few people had ever thought it necessary to take pains with John Saxton, and he greatly enjoyed the novelty of this intercourse with a man of his own age who was not a bore. The bores, as Saxton remembered from his college days, had taken advantage of his good nature and marked him for their own; and with a keen realization of this he had often wondered in bitterness whether they did not classify him correctly.

"I'll wager that if you stay here a year you'll never leave," said Raridan, as they went downstairs together. "I've been about a good deal, and know that we who live here miss a lot of comfort and amusement which go as a matter of course in older towns. But there's a roominess and expansiveness about things out here that I like, and I believe most men who strike it early enough like it, and are lonesome for it if they go away. These people here think I stay because my few business interests are here. The truth is that I've tried run-

ning away, but after I've spent a week east of the Alleghanies, I'm sated with the fleshpots and pine for the wilderness. Why, I go to the stockyards now and then just to see the train-loads of steers come in. I get sensations out of the rush and drive of all this that I wouldn't take a good deal for."

"I think I understand how you feel about it," said Saxton, looking more closely at this young man, who was not ashamed to mention his sensations of sentiment to a stranger. "There were times in Wyoming when Western life seemed pretty arid, but when I went back to Boston I was homesick for Cheyenne."

"That's a far cry, from Boston to Cheyenne," said Raridan, laughing. He began again volubly: "A good deal depends, I suppose, on which end you cry from. There's a lot of talk these days about the *nouveaux riches* by people who haven't any more French than that. We are advised by a fairly competent poet that men may climb on stepping-stones of their dead selves to higher things; but if they climb on the pickled remains of the common or garden pig I don't see anything ignoble about it. I'd a lot rather ascend on a pyramid of Minnehaha Hams than on my dead self, which I hope to avoid using for step-ladder purposes as long as possible. The people here are human beings, and they're all good enough to suit me. I'd as lief be descended from a canvased ham as an Astor peltry or a Vanderbilt steamboat. And I'm tired of the jokes in the barber-shop comic weeklies, about the rich Westerners who make a vulgar display of themselves in New York. If we do it, it's merely because we're doing in Rome as the Romans do. These same shampoo and hair-cut humorists

are unable to get away from their jests about the homicidal tendencies of Western barkeepers and the woolliness of the cowboys. Those anemic commuters down there know no higher joy than a Weber & Fields matinee or a Rogers Brothers on the Bronx first-night. Sometimes I feel moved to grow a line of whiskers and add my barbaric yawp to the long howl of the Populist wolf. But, you know," he added, suddenly lowering his voice, "I reserve the right to abuse my fellow citizens when I love them most. I tore Populism to tatters last fall in a few speeches they let me make in the back counties. Our central committee hadn't anything to lose out there. That's why they sent me!"

Saxton was walking beside Raridan in the lower hall. He felt an impulse to express gratitude for his rescue from the loneliness of the twilight; but Raridan, talking incessantly, and with hands thrust easily into his trousers' pockets, led the way into the reading-room.

"Hello, Wheaton, I didn't know you were at home," he called to a man who sat reading a newspaper, and who now rose on seeing a stranger with Raridan.

"This is Mr. Saxton, Mr. Wheaton."

"Oh, yes," said the man introduced as Wheaton. "I wondered whether I shouldn't see you here. Mr. Porter told me you had come."

"I've been bringing Mr. Saxton up to date in local history," said Raridan.

"Chiefly concerning yourself, I suppose," said Wheaton, with a smile that did not wholly succeed in being amiable.

"It isn't often I get a chance at a brand new man,"

Raridan ran on. "I've told the worst about you, so conduct yourself accordingly."

"Mr. Raridan's worst isn't very bad," said Saxton. "From his account of this town and its people, the place must be paradise and the inhabitants saints."

Raridan called for cigars, but Wheaton declined them.

"Remarkable fellow," said Raridan, busy with his match. "Paragon among our business men; exemplary habits, and so forth." He waved the smoking match-stick to imply virtues in Wheaton which it was unnecessary to mention.

Wheaton ignored Raridan's chaffing way. He seemed very serious, and had not much to say. He had just come home, from a tedious trip to the western part of the state, he said, on an errand for his bank. He was tall, slim and dark. There was a suggestion of sleepy indifference in his black eyes, though he had a well-established reputation for energy and industry. Saxton commented to himself that Wheaton's hands and feet were smaller than he thought becoming in a man.

"Mr. Porter told me you were quartered here. I hope they can make you comfortable. I'm personally relieved that you have come. Your Boston friends were getting very impatient with us. We shall do all in our power to aid you; but of course Mr. Porter has said all that to you." His smile was by a movement of the lips, and his eyes did not seem to participate in it. He did not refer again to possible business relations with Saxton, but turned the conversation into general channels. They sat together for an hour, Raridan, as was his way in any company, doing most of the talking. They seemed to have the club house to themselves. Now

and then one of the negro servants came and looked in upon them sleepily. A clerk at the desk in the hall read in peace. A party of young people could be heard entering by the side door set apart for women; and muffled echoes of their gaiety reached the trio in the reading-room.

"That's back in the incurables' ward," said Raridan, in explanation to Saxton.

"It isn't nice of you to speak of the gentler sex in that way," admonished Wheaton.

"Oh, there are girls and girls," said Raridan wearily. "It does seem to me that Mabel Margrave is always hungry. Why can't she do her eating at home?"

"He's simply jealous," Wheaton remarked to Saxton. "He always acts that way when he hears a girl in the ladies' dining-room, and doesn't dare go back and break in on some other fellow's party."

"When you show signs of mental decay, it's time for us to go home, Wheaton." Raridan held out his hand to Saxton. "I'm glad you're here, and you may be sure we'll try to make you like us. Wheaton and I live in a barracks around the corner, with a few other homeless wanderers. An ill-favored thing,—but our own! I hope to see you there. Don't be afraid of the Chinaman at the door. My cell is up one flight and to the right."

"And don't overlook me there," Wheaton interposed. "I suppose we shall see you down town very often. Mr. Raridan is the only man in Clarkson who has no visible means of support. The rest of us are pretty busy; but that doesn't mean that we shan't be glad to see you at the Clarkson National."

"You see how intensely commercial he is," said Raridan. "He's talking for the bank, you notice, and not for himself."

"I'm sure he means both." Saxton had followed them to the front door, where they repeated their good nights; he then climbed slowly to his room. He had never before met a man so volatile and fanciful as Warrick Raridan. He felt the warmth and friendliness of Raridan's nature as people always did; Wheaton seemed cold and dull in comparison. Saxton unpacked his trunks and distributed his things about the room. His effects were simple, as befitted a man who was plain of mind and person. He had collected none of the memorabilia which young men usually have assembled at twenty-five. The furnishings of his dressing table and desk were his own purchases, or those of his sister, who was the only woman that had ever made him gifts. Having emptied his trunks and sent them to the storeroom above, he seated himself comfortably in a lounging chair and smoked a final pipe before turning in.

CHAPTER III

SWEET PEAS

When he confided to John Saxton his belief that there were those among his fellow townsmen who thought him "crooked," William Porter had no serious idea that such was the case. He had, however, an impression that the term "crooked" implied a high degree of sagacity and shrewdness. He knew men in other cities whose methods were, to put it mildly, indirect, and their names were synonymous with success. It pleased him to think that he was of their order, and he was rich enough to indulge this idiosyncrasy without fear of the criticisms of his neighbors. It amused him to quiz customers of his bank, though he took care not to estrange them. While his fellow citizens never seriously reflected on his integrity, yet they did say that "Billy" Porter knew his business; that he was "on to his job"; or, that to get ahead of him one must "get up early in the morning". "Billy Porter's luck" was a significant phrase in Clarkson. Porter had occasionally scored phenomenal successes, until his legitimate credit as a man of business was reinforced by this reputation. He believed that he enjoyed the high favor of fortune, and it lent assurance to his movements.

Porter lived well, as became a first citizen of Clark-

son. His house stood at the summit of a hill near the end of Varney Street, and the gradual slope leading up to it was a pretty park, whose lawn and shrubbery showed the intelligent care of a good gardener. The dry air was still hot as John Saxton climbed the cement walk which wound over the slope at the proper degree to bring the greatest comfort to pedestrians. The green of the lawn was grateful to Saxton's eyes, which dwelt with relief on the fine spray of the rotary sprinklers that hissed coolly at the end of long lines of hose. Interspersed among the indigenous scrub-oaks were elms, maples and cedars, and the mottled bark of white birches showed here and there. The lawn was broken by beds of cannas, and it was evident that the owner of the place had a taste for landscape gardening and spent his money generously in cultivating it. The house itself was of red brick dating from those years in which a Mansard roof and a tower were thought indispensable in serious domestic architecture. There was a broad veranda on the river side, accessible through French windows of the same architectural period.

A maid admitted Saxton and left him to find his own way into the drawing-room, through which a breeze was blowing pleasantly from across the valley. The ceilings in the house were high and the hardwood floors seemed inconsonant with them and had evidently been added at a later date. A white marble mantel and the grate beneath it were hidden by palms. Above the mantel was a large mirror framed in heavy gilt. A piano formed a barricade across the lower end of the room. One wall was covered with a wonderful old French tapestry depicting a fierce hand-to-hand battle

in which the warriors and their horses were greatly confused.

Saxton sat in a deep wicker chair, mopping his forehead. He had spent a busy day, and it was with real satisfaction that he found himself in a cool house where the atmosphere of comfort and good taste brought ease to all his senses. He had not expected to find so pleasant a house; verily, the marks of philistinism were not upon it. It seemed to him unlikely that Porter maintained solitary state here, and he wondered who could be the other members of the household. The maid had disappeared into the silent depths of the house without waiting for his name, and did not return. His eyes moved again in leisurely fashion to the wall before him, and to the mirror, which reflected nothing of his immediate surroundings, but disclosed the shelves and books of a room on the opposite side of the hall.

He was amusing himself in speculations as to what manner of library a man like Porter would have, and whether he read anything but the newspapers, when the shadow of a young woman crept into the mirror; she stood placing flowers in a vase on a table in the center of the room. He thought for a moment that a figure from a painting had given a pretty head and a pair of graceful shoulders to the mirror. In the room where he sat the frames contained peasants in sabots, generous panels of Hudson River landscape, a Detaille and an Inness. He changed the direction of his eyes to inspect again the Brittany girl that stood looking out over the sea in the manner of Brittany girls in pictures. The girl in the mirror was not the same; moreover, he could hear her humming softly; her head moved gracefully;

there was no question of her reality. Her hands had brought a bunch of sweet peas within the mirror's compass, and were detaching a part of them for the vase by which she stood. She hummed on in her absorption, bending again, so that Saxton lost sight of her; then she stood upright, holding the unused flowers as if uncertain what to do with them. The head flashed out of the mirror, which reflected again only the library shelves and books. Then he heard a light step crossing the hall, and the girl, still singing softly to herself, passed back of him to a little stand which stood by one of the drawing-room windows. The back of the wicker chair hid him; she was wholly unconscious that any one was there. The breath of the sweet peas which she was distributing suddenly sweetened the cool air of the room. Seeing that the girl did not know of his presence in the house, and that she would certainly discover him when she turned to go, he rose and faced her.

"I beg your pardon!"

"Oh!" The sweet peas fell to the floor, and the girl looked anxiously toward the hall door.

"I beg your pardon," Saxton repeated. "I think—I fear—I wasn't announced. But I believe that Mr. Porter is expecting me."

"Yes?" The girl looked at John for the first time. He was taking the situation seriously, and was sincerely sorry for having startled her. His breadth of shoulders was impressive; he was clad in gray homespun, and there seemed to be a good deal of it in the room. His smooth-shaven face was sunburned. She thought he might be an Englishman. He was of the big blond English type common in the American cattle country.

"Father will be here very soon, I think." She moved toward the door with dignity, ignoring the fallen flowers, and Saxton stepped forward and picked them up.

"Allow me." The girl took them from him, a little uncertainly and guardedly, then returned to the vase and placed the flowers in it.

"Thank you very much," she said. "I think I hear my father now." She went to the outer door and opened it, inclining her head slightly as she passed John, who also heard Mr. Porter's voice outside. He was remonstrating with the gardener about the position of the sprinklers, which he wished reset in keeping with ideas of his own.

"Well, Evelyn?" he said, as he came up the steps. Saxton could hear the young woman making an explanation in low tones to her father. He knew, of course, that she was telling him that some one was waiting, and Mr. Porter stood suddenly in the door with his hat still on his head.

"Well, this beats me," he began effusively, coming forward and wringing Saxton's hand. "This beats me! I'm not going to try to explain. I simply forgot, that's all." He took Saxton's arm and turned him toward the door where the girl still stood, smiling.

"Evelyn, this is Mr. Saxton. He's come to dine with us. Bless my soul! but I forgot all about it. See here, Evelyn, you've got to square this for me," he concluded, and pushed his hat back from his forehead as he appealed to her.

She came forward and shook hands with Saxton.

"I don't know how it can be 'squared.' This is only

one of father's lapses, Mr. Saxton. You may be sure he didn't mean to do it."

"No, indeed," declared Porter, "but I'm ashamed of myself. Guess I'm losing my wits." He waved the young people to seats with his hat, as if anxious to have the apologies over as quickly as possible. "Positively no reflection,—no, sir. Why, the last time it happened—"

"A week ago to-night," his daughter interpolated.

"The victim was the lord mayor of somewhere, who was passing through town, and I asked him and his gang for dinner, and actually didn't telephone to the house about it until half-past five in the afternoon. I'm losing my wits, that's all." He continued to paint his social crimes, while his daughter disappeared to correct his latest error by having a plate laid for the unannounced guest. When she returned he left the room, but reappeared at the lower door of the drawing-room, still holding his hat, and exclaimed sharply: "Evelyn, I'm sure I must have told you about Mr. Saxton being here when we were talking of the Poindexter place last night. I told you some one was coming out to take charge of those things."

"Very well, father," she said patiently, turning toward him. He again vanished into the hall having, he thought, justified himself before his guest.

"This is one of our standing jokes, you see, and father feels that he must defend himself. I was away for so long and father lived down town until his domestic instinct has suffered."

"But I'm sure he hasn't lost his instinct of hospitality," said Saxton.

"No; but it's his instinct of consideration for the housekeeper that's blunted." She was still smiling over the incident in a way that had the effect of including Saxton as a party to the joke, rather than as its victim. He found himself feeling altogether comfortable and was able to lead off into a discussion of the heat and of the appearance of the grounds, which he pronounced charming.

"Oh, that's father's great delight," she said. "I tell him he's far more interested in the grounds than the house. He's an easy prey to the compilers of flower catalogues, and people who sell trees go to him first; then they never need to go any farther. He always buys them out!"

They were touching upon the beneficence of Arbor Day when Porter returned with an appearance of clean cuffs and without his hat, and launched into statistics as to the number of trees that had been planted in the state by school children during the past year. The maid came to announce dinner, and Porter talked on as he led the way to the dining-room. As they were taking their seats a boy of twelve took the place opposite Saxton.

"This is my brother Grant," said Miss Porter. The boy was shy and silent and looked frail. The efforts of his sister to bring him into the talk were fruitless. When his father or sister spoke to him it was with an accented kindness. He would not talk before a stranger; but his face brightened at the humor of the others.

There was a round table very prettily set with glass candlesticks at the four plates and a bowl of sweet peas in the center. Porter began a discussion of some

problems relating to improvements and changes in the grounds, talking directly across to his daughter, as she served the soup. Her manner with him was very gentle. She added "father" to most of her sentences in addressing him, and there was a kind of caress in the word as she spoke it. Her head, whose outlines had seemed graceful to Saxton as he studied them in the mirror, was now disclosed fully in the soft candle-light of the table. She had a pretty way of bending forward when she spoke which was characteristic and quite in keeping with the frankness of her speech; there was no hint of coquetry or archness about her. Her eyes, which Saxton had thought blue in the drawing-room, were now gray by candle-light. She was very like her father; she had his clear-cut features, though softened and refined, and thoroughly feminine. His eyes were smaller, and there was a quizzical, furtive play of humor in them, which hers lacked. William Porter always seemed to be laughing at you; his daughter laughed with you. You might question the friendliness of her father's quiet joking sometimes, but there was nothing equivocal in her smile or speech.

A woman who is not too subservient to fashion may reveal a good deal of herself in the way she wears her hair. The straight part in Evelyn Porter's seemed to be akin to her clear, frank eyes, contributing to an impression of simplicity and directness. The waves came down upon her forehead and then retreated quickly to each side, as if they had been conscious intruders there, and were only secure when they found refuge in the knot that was gathered low behind. There was in her hair that pretty ripple which men are

reluctant to believe is acquired by processes in which nature has little part. The result in Evelyn's case was to give the light a better playground, and it caught and brightened wherever a ripple held it. Her arms were bare from the elbow and there were suppleness and strength in their firm outlines; her hands were long and slender and had known vigorous service with racket and driver.

Porter was full of a scheme for planting a line of poplars around some lots, which, it seemed, he owned in another part of the town; but he dropped this during a prolonged absence of the waitress from the room, to ask where the girl had gone and whether there was going to be any more dinner.

"It's bad enough, child, for us to forget we've got a guest for dinner, but we needn't rub it in by starving him after he's at the table."

"There is food out there, father, if you'll abide in patience. This is a new girl and she's pretty green. She let Mr. Saxton in and then forgot to tell anybody he'd come." She wished to touch on this, without recurring to the awkward plight in which Saxton had been placed; and John now seized the chance to minimize it so that the incident might be closed.

"Oh, it was very flattering to me! She left me alone with an air that implied my familiar acquaintance with the house. It was much kinder than asking for credentials."

"You're not hard enough on these people, Evelyn," declared Porter. "That's something they didn't teach you at college. If you let the impression get out that you're easy, you'll never make a housekeeper. Fire

them! fire them whenever you find they're no good!" He looked to Saxton for corroboration, with a severe air, as if this were something that masculine minds understood but which was beyond the reach of women.

When all were served he grew abstracted as he ate, and Saxton appealed to his hostess, as one college graduate may appeal to another, along the line of their college experiences. They had, it appeared, several acquaintances in common; and Saxton recalled that some of his classmates had often visited the college in which Miss Porter had been a student; and a little of the old ache crept into his heart as he remembered the ways in which the social side of college life had meant so much less to him than to most of the men he knew; but as she talked freely of her own experience, he found that her humor was contagious, and he even fell so far under its spell as to recount anecdotes of his own student life in which his part had not been heroic. Porter came back occasionally from the land of his commercial dreams, and they all laughed together at the climaxes. He presently directed the talk to the cattle business.

"You'd better get Mr. Saxton to tell you how much fun ranching is," he said, turning to the boy, who at once became interested in Saxton.

"I'm going to be a ranchman," the lad declared. "Father's going to buy me the Poindexter ranch some day."

"That's one of Mr. Saxton's properties. Maybe he'd trade it to you for a tin whistle."

"Is it as bad as that?" asked Saxton.

"Just wait until you see it. It's pretty bad."

"The house must have been charming," said Miss Porter.

"And that's about all it was," replied her father.

The dinner ended with a salad. This was not an incident but an event. The highest note of civilization is struck when a salad is dressed by a master of the chemistry of gastronomy. The clumsy and unworthy hesitate in the performance of this sacred rite, and are never sure of their proportions; the oil refuses intimacy with the vinegar, and sulks and selfishly creates little yellow isles for itself in the estranging sea of acid. The salt becomes indissoluble and the paprika is irrecoverable flotsam. The clove of garlic, always recalcitrant under clumsy handling, refuses to impart the merest hint of its wild tang, but the visible and tangible world reeks with it. It was a joy to John Saxton to see the deftness with which Evelyn Porter performed her miracle; he did not know much about girls, but he surmised that a girl who composed a salad dressing with such certainty did many things gracefully and well. There were no false starts, no "ohs" of regret and appeal, no questions of quantity. The light struck goldenly on the result as she poured it finally upon the crisply-curling lettuce leaves which showed discreetly over the edge of a deep Doulton bowl. It seemed to him high treason that his host should decline the dressing thus produced by an art which realized the dreams of alchemy, and should pour vinegar from the cruet with his own hand upon the helpless leaves.

Porter demanded cigars before the others had finished, and smoked over his coffee. He was in a hurry to leave, and at the earliest possible moment led the way to

the veranda, picking up his hat as he stepped blithely along.

It was warmer outside than in, but Porter pretended that it was pleasanter out of doors, and insisted that there was always a breeze on the hill at night. He ran on in drawling monologue about the weather conditions, and how much cooler it was in Clarkson than at the summer places which people foolishly sought at the expense of home comforts. He made his shy boy report his experiences of the day. In addressing the lad he fell into his quizzical manner, but the boy understood it and yielded to it with the same submission that his father's customers adopted when they sought a loan and knew that Porter must prod them with immaterial questions, and irritate them with petty ironies, before he finally scribbled his initials in the corner of their notes and passed them over to the discount clerk.

Raridan appeared at the step presently. They all rose as he came up, and he said to Saxton as he shook hands with him last: "I see you've found the way to headquarters. All roads lead up to this Alpine height,—and I fear—I fear—that all roads lead down again," he added, with a doleful sigh, and laughed. He drew out his cigarettes and began making himself greatly at home. He assured Mr. Porter, with amiable insolence, that his veranda chairs were the most uncomfortable ones he knew, and went to fetch himself a better seat from the hall.

"Mr. Raridan likes to be comfortable," said Miss Porter in his absence.

"But he finds pleasure in making others comfortable, too," Saxton ventured.

"Oh, he's the very kindest of men," Miss Porter affirmed.

"What a nuisance you are, Warry," said Porter, as the young man fussed about to find a place for his chair. "We were all very easy here till you came. Even the breeze has died out."

"Father insists that there has been a breeze," said Miss Porter. "But it really has gone."

"*Et tu, Brute?* What we ought to do, Mr. Porter," said Raridan, who had at last settled himself, "is to organize a company to supply breezes. 'The Clarkson Breeze Company, Limited.' I can see the name on the factory now, in my mind's eye. We'd get up an ice trust first, then bring in the ice cream people and make vast fortunes out of it, besides becoming benefactors of our kind. The ice and the ice cream would pay for the cold air; our cold air service would bring a clear profit. We'd guarantee a temperature through the summer months of, say, seventy degrees."

"Then," Porter drawled, "the next thing would be to get the doctors in, for a pneumonia branch; and after that the undertakers would demand admission, and then the tombstone people. You're a bright young man, Warry. I heard you stringing that Englishman at the club the other day about your scheme for piping water from the Atlantic Ocean to irrigate the American desert, and he thought you meant it."

"Then we'll all suffer," Miss Porter declared, "for he'll go home and put it in a book, and there'll be no end of it."

Raridan was in gay spirits. He had come from a call on a young married couple who had just gone to house-

keeping. He had met there a notoriously awkward young man, who moved through Clarkson houses leaving ruin in his wake.

"There ought to be some way of insuring against Whitely," said Raridan, musingly. "Perhaps a social casualty company could be formed to protect people from his depredations. You know, Mr. Saxton, they've really had to cut him off from refreshments at parties,—he was always spilling salads on the most expensive gowns in town. And these poor young married things, with their wedding loot huddled about them in their little parlors! There is a delightful mathematical nicety in the way he sweeps a tea table with his coat tails. He never leaves enough for a sample. But this was the worst! You know that polar bear skin that Mamie Shepard got for a wedding present; well, it makes her house look like a menagerie. Whitely was backing out—a thing I've begged him never to try—and got mixed up with the head of that monster; kicked all the teeth out, started to fall, gathered in the hat rack, broke the glass out of it, and before Shepard could head him off, he pulled down the front door shade."

"But Mr. Whitely sings beautifully," urged Miss Porter.

"He'd have to," said Warry, "with those feet."

"You needn't mind what Raridan says," Mr. Porter remarked. "He's very unreliable."

"The office of social censor is always an ungrateful one," Raridan returned, dolefully. "But I really don't know what you'd do without me here."

"I notice that you never give us a chance to try," said Mr. Porter, dryly.

"That is the unkindest cut; and in the shadow of your own house, too."

Saxton got up to go presently and Raridan rose with him, declaring that they had been terribly severe and that he could not be left alone with them.

"I hope you'll overlook that little slip of mine," said Mr. Porter, as he shook hands with Saxton. "You'd better not tell Raridan about it. It would be terrible ammunition in his hands."

"And we'll all do better next time," said Miss Porter; "so do come again to show that you don't treasure it against us."

"I don't know that anything's happened," pleaded John, "except that I've had a remarkably good time."

"I fear that's more generous than just; but the next time I hope the maid will do better."

"And next time I hope I shan't frighten you," Saxton went on. Raridan and Mr. Porter had walked down the long veranda to the steps, and Saxton and Miss Porter were following.

"Oh, but you didn't!" the girl laughed at him.

"But you dropped the flowers—"

"But you shouldn't have noticed! It wasn't gallant!"

They had reached the others, and Raridan broke in with his good night, and he and Saxton went down the walk together.

"They seem to have struck up an acquaintance," observed Mr. Porter, settling himself to a fresh cigar.

"Mr. Saxton is very nice," said Evelyn.

"Oh, he's all right," said her father, easily.

CHAPTER IV

AT POINDEXTER'S

John Saxton trotted his pony through a broken gate into a great yard that had once been sown in blue grass, and at the center of which lay the crumbled ruins of a fountain. This was clearly no ordinary establishment, as he had been warned, and he was uncertain how to hail it. However, before he could make his presence known, a frowsy man in corduroy emerged from the great front door and came toward him.

"My name's Saxton, and you must be Snyder."

"Correct," said the man and they shook hands.

"Going to stay a while?"

"A day or two." John threw down the slicker in which he had wrapped a few articles from his bag at Great River, the nearest railway station.

"I got your letter all right," said Snyder. "Walk in and help yourself." He led the pony toward the outbuildings, while Saxton filled his pipe and viewed the pile before him with interest. He had been making a careful inspection of all the properties that had fallen to his care. This had necessitated a good deal of traveling. He had begun in Colorado and worked eastward, going slowly, and getting the best advice obtainable as to the value of his principals' holdings. Much of their

property was practically worthless. Title had been gained under foreclosure to vast areas which had no value. A waterworks plant stood in the prairie where there had once been a Kansas town. The place was depopulated and the smokestack stood as a monument to blighted hopes. Ranch houses were inhabited by squatters, who had not been on his books at all, and who paid no tribute to Boston. He was viewed with suspicion by these tenants, and on inquiry at the county seats, he found generally that they were lawless men, and that it would be better for him to let them alone. It was patent that they would not pay rent, and to eject them merely in the maintenance of a principle involved useless expense and violence.

"This certainly beats them all," Saxton muttered aloud.

He had reached in his itinerary what his papers called the Poindexter property. He had found that the place was famous throughout this part of the country for the idiosyncrasies of its sometime owners, three young men who had come out of the East to show how the cattle business should be managed. They had secured an immense acreage and built a stone ranch house whose curious architecture imparted to the Platte Valley a touch of medievalism that was little appreciated by the neighboring cattlemen. One of the owners, a Philadelphian named Poindexter, who had a weakness for architecture and had studied the subject briefly at his university, contributed the buildings and his two associates bought the cattle. There were one thousand acres of rolling pasture here, much of it lying along the river, and a practical man

could hardly have failed to succeed; but theft, disease in the herd and inexperience in buying and selling, had wrought the ranchmen's destruction. Before their money was exhausted, Poindexter and his associates lived in considerable state, and entertained the friends who came to see them according to the best usages of Eastern country life within, and their own mild approximation of Western life without. Tom Poindexter's preceptor in architecture, an elderly gentleman with a sense of humor, had found a pleasure which he hardly dared to express in the medieval tone of the house and buildings.

"All you need, Tom," he said, "to make the thing complete, is a drawbridge and a moat. The possibilities are great in the light of modern improvements in such things. An electric drawbridge, operated solely by switches and buttons, would be worth while." The folly of man seems to express itself naturally in the habitations which he builds for himself; the folly of Tom Poindexter had been of huge dimensions and he had built a fairly permanent monument to it. He and his asssociates began with an ambition to give tone to the cattle business, and if novel ideas could have saved them, they would not have failed. One of their happy notions was to use Poindexter's coat of arms as a brand, and this was abandoned only when their foreman declared that no calf so elaborately marked could live. They finally devised an insignium consisting of the Greek Omega in a circle of stars.

"There's a remnant of the Poindexter herd out there somewhere," Wheaton had said to Saxton. "The fellow Snyder, that I put in as a caretaker, ought to have

gathered up the loose cattle by this time; that's what I told him to do when I put him there."

Saxton turned and looked out over the rolling plain. A few rods away lay the river, and where it curved nearest the house stood a group of cottonwoods, like sentinels drawn together for colloquy. Scattered here and there over the plain were straggling herds. On a far crest of the rolling pastures a lonely horseman paused, sharply outlined for a moment against the sky; in another direction, a blur drew his eyes to where a group of the black Polled Angus cattle grazed, giving the one blot of deep color to the plain.

Snyder reappeared, and Saxton followed him into the house.

"It isn't haunted or anything like that?" John asked, glancing over the long hall.

"No. They have a joke about that at Great River. They say the only reason is that there ain't any idiot ghosts."

There was much in the place to appeal to Saxton's quiet humor. The house was two stories high and there was a great hall, with an immense fireplace at one end. The sleeping rooms opened on a gallery above the hall. An effort had been made to give the house the appearance of Western wildness by introducing a great abundance of skins of wild beasts,—a highly dishonest bit of decorating, for they had been bought in Chicago. How else, indeed, would skins of German boars and Polar bears be found in a ranch house on the Platte River! Under one wing of the stairway, which divided to left and right at the center of the hall, was the dining-room; under the other was the ranch office.

"Those fellows thought a good deal of their stomachs," said Snyder, as Saxton opened and shut the empty drawers of the sideboard, which had been built into one end of the western wall of the room, in such a manner that a pane of glass, instead of a mirror, filled the center. The intention of this was obviously to utilize the sunset for decorative purposes, and Saxton chuckled as he comprehended the idea.

"I suppose our mortgage covers the sunset, too," he said. Nearly every portable thing of value had been removed, and evidently in haste; but the heavy oak chairs and the table remained. Snyder did his own modest cooking in the kitchen, which was in great disorder. The floor of the office was littered with scraps of paper. The original tenants had evidently made a quick settlement of their business affairs before leaving. Snyder slept here; his blanket lay in a heap on the long bench that was built into one side of the room, and a battered valise otherwise marked it as his lodging place. Saxton viewed the room with disgust; it was more like a kennel than a bedroom. His foot struck something on the floor; it was a silver letter-seal bearing the peculiar Poindexter brand, and he thrust it into his pocket with a laugh.

"My ranching wasn't so bad after all," he muttered.

"What's that?" asked Snyder, who was stolidly following him about.

"Nothing. If you have a pony we'll take a ride around the fences."

They spent the day in the saddle riding over the range. The ridiculous character of the Poindexter undertaking could not spoil the real value of the land. There was,

Saxton could see, the making here of a great farming property; he felt his old interest in outdoor life quickening as he rode back to the house in the evening.

Snyder cooked supper for both of them, while Saxton repaired a decrepit windmill which had been designed to supply the house with water. He had formed a poor opinion of the caretaker, who seemed to know nothing of the property and who had, as far as he could see, no well defined duties. The man struck him as an odd person for the bank to have chosen to be the custodian of a ranch property. There was nothing for any one to do unless the range were again stocked and cattle raising undertaken as a serious business. Saxton was used to rough men and their ways. He had a happy faculty of adapting himself to the conversational capacities of illiterate men, and enjoyed drawing them out and getting their point of view; but Snyder's was not a visage that inspired confidence. He had a great shock of black hair and a scraggy beard. He lacked an eye, and he had a habit of drawing his head around in order to accommodate his remaining orb to any necessity. He did this with an insinuating kind of deliberation that became tiresome in a long interview.

"This place is too fancy to be of much use," the man vouchsafed, puffing at his pipe. "You may find some dude that wants to plant money where another dude has dug the first hole; but I reckon you'll have a hard time catching him. A real cattleman wouldn't care for all this house. It might be made into a stable, but a horse would look ridiculous in here. You might have a corn crib made out of it; or it would do for a hotel if you could get dudes to spend the summer here; but I

reckon it's a little hot out here for summer boarders."

"The only real value is in the land," said Saxton. "I'm told there's no better on the river. The house is a handicap, or would be so regarded by the kind of men who make money out of cattle. Have you ever tried rounding up the cattle that strayed through the fences? The Poindexter crowd must have branded their last calves about two years ago. Assuming that only a part of them was sold or run off, there ought to be some two-year-olds still loose in this country and they'd be worth finding."

Snyder took his pipe from his mouth and snorted. "Yer jokin' I guess. These fellers around here are good fellers, and all that, but I guess they don't give anything back. I guess we ain't got any cattle coming to us."

"You think you'd rather not try it?"

"Not much!" was the expressive reply. The fellow smoked slowly, bringing his eye into position to see how Saxton had taken his answer.

John was refilling his own pipe and did not look up.

"Who've you been reporting to, Snyder?"

"How's that?"

"Who have you been considering yourself responsible to?"

"Well, Jim Wheaton at the Clarkson National hired me, and I reckon I'd report to him if I reported to anybody. But if you're going to run this shebang and want to be reported to, I guess I can report to you." He brought his turret around again and Saxton this time met his eye.

"I want you to report to me," said John quietly. "In

the first place I want the house and the other buildings cleaned out. After that the fences must be put in shape. And then we'll see if we can't find some of our cows. You can't tell; we may open up a real ranch here and go into business."

Snyder was sprawling at his ease in a Morris chair, and had placed his feet on a barrel. He did not seem interested in the activities hinted at.

"Well, if you're the boss I'll do it your way. I got along all right with Wheaton."

He did not say whether he intended to submit to authority or not, and Saxton dropped the discussion. John rose and found a candle with which he lighted himself to bed in one of the rooms above. The whole place was dirty and desolate. The house had never been filled save once, and that was on the occasion of a housewarming which Poindexter and his fellows had given when they first took possession. One of their friends had chartered a private car and had brought out a party of young men and women, who had enlivened the house for a few days; but since then no woman had entered the place. In the Poindexter days it had been carefully kept, but now it was in a sorry plight. There had been a whole year of neglect and vacancy, in which the house had been used as a meeting place for the wilder spirits of the neighborhood, who had not hesitated to carry off whatever pleased their fancy and could be put on the back of a horse. Saxton chose for himself the least disorderly of the rooms, in which the furniture was whole, and where there were even a few books lying about. He determined to leave for Clarkson the following morning, and formulated in his mind the

result of his journey and plans for the future of the incongruous combination of properties that had been entrusted to him. He sat for an hour looking out over the moon-lit valley. He followed the long sweep of the plain, through which he could see for miles the bright ribbon of the river. A train of cars rumbled far away, on the iron trail between the two oceans, intensifying the loneliness of the strange house.

"I seem to find only the lonely places," he said aloud, setting his teeth hard into his pipe.

In the morning he ate the breakfast of coffee, hard-tack and bacon which Snyder prepared.

"I guess you want me to hustle things up a little," said Snyder, more amiably than on the day before. He turned his one eye and his grin on Saxton, who merely said that matters must take a new turn, and that if a ranch could be made out of the place there was no better time to begin than the present. He had not formulated plans for the future, and could not do so without the consent and approval of his principals; but he meant to put the property in as good condition as possible without waiting for instructions. Snyder rode with him to the railway station.

"Give my regards to Mr. Wheaton," he said, as Saxton swung himself into the train. "You'll find me here at the old stand when you come back."

"A queer customer and undoubtedly a bad lot," was Saxton's reflection.

When Saxton had written out the report of his trip he took it to Wheaton, to get his suggestions before forwarding it to Boston. He looked upon the cashier as his predecessor, and wished to avail himself of Wheaton's

knowledge of the local conditions affecting the several properties that had now passed to his care. Wheaton undoubtedly wished to be of assistance, and in their discussion of the report, the cashier made many suggestions of value, of which Saxton was glad to avail himself.

"As to the Poindexter place," said Saxton finally, "I've been advertising it for sale in the hope of finding a buyer, but without results. The people at headquarters can't bother about the details of these things, but I'm blessed if I can see why we should maintain a caretaker. There's nothing there to take care of. That house is worse than useless. I'm going back in a few days to see if I can't coax home some of the cattle we're entitled to; they must be wandering over the country,—if they haven't been rustled, and then I suppose we may as well dispense with Snyder."

He had used the plural pronoun out of courtesy to Wheaton, wishing him to feel that his sanction was asked in any changes that were made.

"I don't see that there's anything else to do," Wheaton answered. "I've been to the ranch, and there's little personal property there worth caring for. That man Snyder came along one day and asked for a job and I sent him out there thinking he'd keep things in order until the Trust Company sent its own representative here."

There were times when Wheaton's black eyes contracted curiously, and this was one of the times.

"I don't like discharging a man that you've employed," Saxton replied.

"Oh, that's all right. You can't keep him if he per-

forms no service. Don't trouble about him on my account. How soon are you going back there?"

"Next week some time."

"Traveling about the country isn't much fun," Wheaton said, sympathetically.

"Oh, I rather like it," replied Saxton, putting on his hat.

Saxton was not surprised when he returned to the ranch to find that Snyder had made no effort to obey his instructions. He made his visit unexpectedly, leaving the train at Great River, where he secured a horse and rode over to the ranch. He reached the house in the middle of the morning and found the front door bolted and barred on the inside. After much pounding he succeeded in bringing Snyder to the door, evidently both surprised and displeased at his interruption.

"Howdy, boss," was the salutation of the frowsy custodian; "I wasn't feeling just right to-day and was takin' a little nap."

The great hall showed signs of a carousal. The dirt had increased since Saxton's first appearance. Empty bottles that had been doing service as candlesticks stood in their greasy shrouds on the table. Saxton sat down on a keg, which had evidently been recently emptied, and lighted a pipe. He resolved to make quick work of Snyder.

"How many cattle have you rounded up since I was here?" he demanded.

"Well, to tell the truth," began Snyder, "there ain't been much time for doing that since you was here."

"No; I suppose you were busy mending fences and cleaning house. Now you have been drawing forty dol-

lars a month for doing nothing. I'll treat you better than you deserve and give you ten dollars bonus to get out. I believe the pony in the corral belongs to you. We'll let it go at that. Here's your money."

"Well, I guess as Mr. Wheaton hired me, he'd better fire me," the fellow began, bringing his eye to bear upon Saxton.

"Yes, I spoke to Mr. Wheaton about you. He understands that you're to go."

"He does, does he?" Snyder replied with a sneer. "He must have forgot that I had an arrangement with him by the year."

"Well, it's all off," said Saxton, rising. He began throwing open the windows and doors to let in fresh air, for the place was foul with the stale fumes of whisky and tobacco.

"Well, I guess I'll have to see Mr. Wheaton," Snyder retorted, finding that Saxton was paying no further attention to him. He collected his few belongings, watching in astonishment the violence with which Saxton was gathering up and disposing of rubbish.

"Going to clean up a little?" he asked, with his leer.

"No, I'm just exercising for fun," replied Saxton. "If you're ready, you'd better take your pony and skip."

Snyder growled his resentment and moved toward the door with a bundle under his arm and a saddle and bridle thrown over his shoulder.

"I'll be up town to see Mr. Wheaton in a day or two," he declared, as he slouched through the door.

"He seems to be more interested in Wheaton than Wheaton is in him," observed Saxton to himself.

Saxton spent a week at Great River. He hired a

man to repair fences and put the house in order. He visited several of the large ranch owners and asked them for aid in picking out the scattered remnants of the Poindexter herd. Nearly all of them volunteered to help, with the result that he collected about one hundred cattle and sold them at Great River for cash. He expected to see or hear of Snyder in the town but the fellow had disappeared.

The fact was that Snyder had ridden over to the next station beyond Great River for his spree, that place being to his liking because it was beyond the jurisdiction of the sheriff whose headquarters were maintained at Great River,—an official who took his office seriously, and who had warned Snyder that his latest offense—getting drunk and smashing a saloon sideboard—must not be repeated. After he had been satisfactorily drunk for a week and had gambled away such of his fortune as the saloonkeeper had not acquired in direct course of commerce, Snyder came to himself sufficiently to send a telegram. Then he sat down to wait, with something of the ease of spirit with which an honest man sends forth a sight draft for collection from a town where he is a stranger, and awaits returns in the full enjoyment of the comforts of his inn.

On the third day, receiving no message from the outside world, Snyder sold his pony and took the train for Clarkson.

CHAPTER V

DEBATABLE QUESTIONS

Evelyn Porter had come home in June to take her place as mistress of her father's house. The fact that she alone of the girls belonging to families of position in the town had gone to college had set her a little apart from the others. During her four years at Smith she had evinced no unusual interest in acquiring knowledge; she was a fair student only and had been graduated without honors save those which her class had admiringly bestowed on her. She had entered into social and athletic diversions with zest and had been much more popular with her fellow students than with the faculty. She brought home no ambition save to make her father's home as comfortable as possible. She said to herself that she would keep up her French and German, and straightway put books within reach to this end. She had looked with wonder unmixed with admiration upon the strenuous woman as she had seen her, full of ambition to remake the world in less than six days; and she dreaded the type with the dread natural in a girl of twenty-two who has a sound appetite, a taste in clothes, with money to gratify it, and a liking for fresh air and sunshine.

She found it pleasant to slip back into the life of the

town; and the girl friends or older women who met her on summer mornings in the shopping district of Clarkson, remarked to one another and reported to their sons and husbands, that Evelyn Porter was at home to stay, and that she was just as cordial and friendly as ever and had no airs. It pleased Evelyn to find that the clerks in the shops remembered her and called her by name; and there was something homelike and simple and characteristic in the way women that met in the shops visited with one another in these places. She caught their habit of going into Vortini's for soda water, where she found her acquaintances of all ages sitting at tables, with their little parcels huddled in their laps, discussing absentees and the weather. She found, in these encounters, that most of the people she knew were again agitated, as always at this season, because Clarkson was no cooler than in previous years; and that the women were expressing their old reluctance to leave their husbands, who could not get away for more than two weeks, if at all. Some were already preparing for Mackinac or Oconomowoc or Wequetonsing, and a few of the more adventurous for the remoter coasts of New Jersey and Massachusetts. The same people were discussing these same questions in the same old spirit, and, when necessary, confessing with delightful frankness their financial disabilities, in excusing their presence in town at a season when it was only an indulgence of providence that all the inhabitants did not perish from the heat.

As a child Evelyn had played in the tower of the house on the hill, and she now made a den of it. Some of her childish playthings were still hidden away in the

window seat, and stirred freshly the remembrance of her mother,—her gentleness, her frailty, her interest in the world's work. She often wondered whether the four years at college had realized all that her dead mother had hoped for; but she was not morbid, and she did not brood. She found a pleasure in stealing up to the tower in the summer nights, and watching the shifting lights of the great railway yards far down the valley, but at such times she had no romantic visions. She knew that the fitful bell of the switch engine and the rumble of wheels symbolized the very practical life of this restless region in which she had been born. She cherished no delusion that she was a princess in a tower, waiting for a lover to come riding from east or west. She had always shared with her companions the young men who visited her at college. When they sometimes sent her small gifts, she had shared these also. Warrick Raridan had gone to see her several times, as an old friend, and he had on these occasions, with characteristic enterprise, made the most of the opportunity to widen his acquaintance among Evelyn's friends, to whom she frankly introduced him.

On the day following John Saxton's introduction to the house, Evelyn was busy pouring oil on rusty places in the domestic machinery, when three cards were brought up to her bearing unfamiliar names. They belonged, she imagined, to some of the newer people of the town who had come to Clarkson during her years from home.

"Mrs. Atherton?" she said inquiringly, pausing before the trio in the drawing-room.

Two of the ladies looked toward the third, with whom Evelyn shook hands.

"Miss Morris and Mrs. Wingate," murmured the lady identified as Mrs. Atherton. They all sat down.

"It's so very nice to know that you are at home again," said Mrs. Atherton, "although I've not had the pleasure of meeting you before. I knew your mother very well, many years ago, but I have been away for a long time and have only recently come back to Clarkson.

"It is very pleasant to be at home again," Evelyn responded.

Mrs. Atherton smiled nervously and looked pointedly at her companions, evidently expecting them to participate in the conversation. The younger woman, who had been presented as Miss Morris, sat rigid in a gilt reception chair. She was of severe aspect and glared at Mrs. Atherton, who threw herself again into the breach.

"I hope you do not dislike the West?" Mrs. Atherton inquired of Evelyn.

"No, indeed! On the other hand I am very proud of it. You know I am a native here, and very loyal."

Miss Morris seized this as if it had been her cue, and declared in severe tones:

"We of the West are fortunate in living away from the artificiality of the East. There is some freedom here; the star of empire hovers here; the strength of the nation lies in the rugged but honest people of the great West, who gave Lincoln to the nation and the nation to Liberty." There was a glitter of excitement in the woman's eyes, but she spoke in low

monotonous tones. Evelyn thought for a moment that this was conscious hyperbole, but Miss Morris's aspect of unrelenting severity undeceived her. Something seemed to be expected of her, and Evelyn said:

"That is all very true, but, you know, they say down East that we are far too thoroughly persuaded of our greatness and brag too much."

"But," continued Miss Morris, "they are coming to us more and more for statesmen. Look at literature! See what our Western writers are doing! The most vital books we are now producing are written west of the Alleghanies!"

"You know Miss Morris is a writer," interrupted Mrs. Atherton. "We should say Doctor Morris," she continued, with a rising inflection on the title,—"not an M. D. Miss Morris is a doctor of philosophy."

"Oh," said Evelyn. "What college, Doctor Morris?"

"The University of North Dakota," with emphasis on the "university." "I had intended going to Heidelberg, but felt that we loyal Americans should patronize home institutions. The choruses of Euripides may ring as grandly on our Western plains as in Athens itself," she added with finality. She enunciated with great care and seemed terribly in earnest to Evelyn, who felt an uncontrollable desire to laugh. But there was, she now imagined, something back of all this, and she waited patiently for its unfolding. The dénouement was, she hoped, near at hand, for Miss Morris moved her eyeglasses higher up on her nose and appeared even more formidable than before.

"I have heard that great emphasis is laid at Smith on social and political economy. You must be very anxious

to make practical use of your knowledge," continued Miss Morris.

Evelyn recalled guiltily her cuts in these studies.

"Carlyle or somebody"—she was afraid to quote before a doctor of philosophy, and thought it wise to give a vague citation—"calls political economy the dismal science, and I'm afraid I have looked at it a little bit that way myself." She smiled hopefully, but Miss Morris did not relax her severity.

"Civic responsibility rests on women as strongly as on men; even more so," declared Miss Morris.

"Well, I think we ought to do what we can," assented Evelyn.

"Now, our Local Council has been doing a great deal toward improving the sanitation of Clarkson."

"Oh yes," exclaimed Mrs. Wingate from her corner.

"And we feel that every educated woman in the community should lend her aid to all the causes of the Local Council."

"Yes?" said Evelyn, rather weakly. She felt that the plot was thickening. "I really know very little of such things, but—" The "but" was highly equivocal.

"And we are very anxious to get a representative on the School Board," continued Miss Morris. "The election is in November. Has it ever occurred to you how perfectly absurd it is for men to conduct our educational affairs when the schools are properly a branch of the home and should be administered, in part, at least, by women?" She punctuated her talk so that her commas cut into the air. Mrs. Wingate, the third and silent lady, approved this more or less inarticulately.

"I know there's a great deal in that," said Evelyn.

"And we, the Executive Committee of the Council, have been directed to ask you"—Mrs. Wingate and Mrs. Atherton moved nervously in their seats, but Miss Morris now spoke with more deliberation, and with pedagogic care of her pronunciation—"to become a candidate for the School Board."

Evelyn felt a cold chill creeping over her, and swallowed hard in an effort to summon some word to meet this shock.

"Your social position," continued Miss Morris volubly, "and the prestige which you as a bachelor of arts have brought home from college, make you a most natural candidate."

"Destiny really seems to be pointing to you," said Mrs. Atherton, with coaxing sweetness in her tone.

"Oh, but I couldn't think of it!" exclaimed Evelyn, recovering her courage. "I have had no experience in such matters! Why, that would be politics!—and I have always felt,—it has seemed to me,—I simply can't consider it!"

She had gained her composure now. She had been called a bachelor of arts, and she felt an impulse to laugh.

"Ah! we had expected that it would seem strange to you at first," said Mrs. Atherton, who appeared to be in charge of the grand strategy of the call, while Miss Morris carried the rapid firing guns and Mrs. Wingate lent moral support, as of a shore battery.

Mrs. Atherton had risen.

"We have all set our hearts on it, and you must not decline. Think it over well, and when you come to

the first meeting of the Council in September, you will, I am sure, be convinced of your duty."

"Yes; a very solemn obligation that wealth and education have laid upon you," Miss Morris amplified.

"A solemn obligation," echoed Mrs. Wingate.

The three filed out, Miss Morris leading the way, while Mrs. Atherton lingeringly covered their retreat with a few words that were intended to convey a knowledge of the summer frivolities then pending.

"I should be very glad to have you come to see me at my rooms," said Miss Morris, wheeling in her short skirt as she reached the door. "I have rooms in the Ætna Building."

"Do come and see us, too," murmured the convoy, smiling in relief as they turned away.

Evelyn sat down in the nearest chair and laughed.

"I wonder whether they think college has made me like that?" she asked herself.

At dinner she gave her father a humorous account of the interview. Grant was away dining with a playmate and they were alone. Porter was in one of his perverse moods, and he began gruffly:

"I should like to know why not! Haven't I spent thousands of dollars on your education? The lady was right; you are, at least so I have understood, a bachelor of arts. Why a bachelor I'm sure I don't know—" He was buttering a bit of bread with deliberation and did not look at Evelyn, who waited patiently, knowing that he would have his whim out.

"It seems to me," he went on, "a proper recognition of your talents and education, and also of me, as one of the oldest citizens of Clarkson. I tell you it is good to

get a little recognition once in a while. I have a painful recollection of having been defeated for School Commissioner about ten years ago. Now here's a chance for the family to redeem itself. Of course you accepted the nomination, and after your election I'll expect you to bring the school funds to my bank, and I'll say to you now that the directors will do the right thing by you."

He was still avoiding Evelyn's eyes, but his humor was growing impatient for recognition.

"Now, father!" she pleaded, and they laughed together.

"Father," she said seriously, "I don't want these people here to get an idea that I'm not an ordinary being."

"That's an astonishing statement," he began, ready for further banter; but she would not have it.

"There are," she said, "certain things that a woman ought to do, whether she's educated or not; and I have ideas about that. So you think these people here are expecting great things of me,—"

"Of course they are, and with reason," said Porter, still anxious to return to his joke.

"But I do not intend to have it! When I'm forty years old I may change my mind, but right now I want—"

She hesitated.

"Well, what do you want, child?" he said gently, with the fun gone out of his voice. They had had their coffee, and she sat with her elbow on the table and her chin in her hand.

"Why, I'm afraid I want to have a good time," she declared, rising.

"And that's just what I want you to have, child," he said kindly, putting his arm about her as they went out together.

Evelyn declined the honor offered her by the local council, at long range, in a note to Doctor Morris, giving no reasons beyond her unfamiliarity with political and school matters. These she knew would not be considered adequate by Doctor Morris, but the latter, after writing a somewhat caustic reply, in which she dwelt upon the new woman's duties and responsibilities, immediately announced her own candidacy. The incident was closed as far as Evelyn was concerned and she was not again approached in the matter.

Her father continued to joke about it, and a few weeks later, when they were alone, referred to it in a way which she knew by experience was merely a feint that concealed some serious purpose. Men of Porter's age are usually clumsy in dealing with their own children, and Porter was no exception. When he had anything of weight on his mind to discuss with Evelyn, he brooded over it for several days before attacking her. His manner with men was easy, and he was known down town as a good bluffer; but he stood not a little in awe of his daughter.

"I suppose things will be gay here this winter," he said, as they sat together on the porch.

"About the same old story, I imagine. The people and their ways don't seem to have changed much."

"You must have some parties yourself. Better start

them up early. Get some of the college girls out, and turn it on strong."

"Well, I shan't want to overdo it. I don't want to be a nuisance to you, and entertaining isn't as easy as it looks."

"It'll do me good, too," he replied. He fidgeted in his chair and played with his hat, which, however, he did not remove, but shifted from one side to the other, smoking his cigar meanwhile without taking it from his mouth. He rose and walked out to one of his sprinklers which had been placed too near the walk and kicked it off into the grass. She watched him with a twinkle in her eyes, and then laughed. "What is it, father?" she asked, when he came back to the porch.

"What's what?" he replied, with assumed irritation. He knew that he must now face the music, and grew composed at once.

"Well, it's this,—" with sudden decision.

"Yes, I knew it was something," she said, still laughing and not willing to make it too easy for him.

"You know the Knights of Midas are quite an institution here—boom the town, and give a fall festival every year. The idea is to get the country people in to spend their money. Lots of tom-foolishness about it,—swords and plumes and that kind of rubbish; but we all have to go in for it. Local pride and so on."

"Yes; do you want me to join the Knights?"

"No, not precisely. But you see, they have a ball every year in connection with the festival, with a queen and maids of honor. I guess you've never seen one of these things, as they have them in October, and you've always been away at school. Now the committee on

entertainment has been after me to see if you'd be queen of the ball this year—"

"Oh!—" ominously.

"Just hold on a minute." He was wholly at ease now, and assumed the manner which he had found effective in dealing with obstreperous customers of his bank. "I'm free to say that I don't like the idea of this myself particularly. There's a lot of publicity about it and you know I don't like that—and the newspapers make an awful fuss. But you see it isn't wise for us"—he laid emphasis on the pronoun—"to set up to be better than other people. Now", with a twinkle in his eye, "you turned down this School Board business the other day and said you wanted to have a good time, just like other girls, and I reckon most of the girls in town would be tickled at a chance like this—"

"And you want me to do it, father? Is that what you mean? But it must be perfectly awful,—the crowd and the foolish mummery."

"Well, there's one thing sure, you'll never have to do it a second time." Porter smiled reassuringly.

"But I haven't said I'd do it once, father."

"I'd like to have you; I'd like it very much, and should appreciate your doing it. But don't say anything about it." Some callers were coming up the walk, so the matter was dropped. Porter recurred to the subject again next day, and Evelyn saw that he wished very much to have her take part in the carnival, but the idea did not grow pleasanter as she considered it. It was quite true, as she had told her father, that she wanted to enjoy herself after the manner of other young women, and without constant reference to her advantages, as

she had heard them called; but the thought of a public appearance in what she felt to be a very ridiculous function did not please her. On the other hand, her father rarely asked anything of her and he would not have made this request without considering it carefully beforehand.

In her uncertainty she went for advice to Mrs. Whipple, the wife of a retired army officer, who had been her mother's friend. Mrs. Whipple was a woman of wide social experience and unusual common sense. She had settled in her day many of those distressing complications which arise at military posts in times of national peace. Young officers still came to her for advice in their love affairs, which she always took seriously, but not too seriously. Warry Raridan maintained unjustly that Mrs. Whipple's advice was bad, but that it did the soul good to see how much joy she got out of giving it. The army had communicated both social dignity and liveliness to Clarkson, as to many western cities which had military posts for neighbors. In the old times when civilians were busy with the struggle for bread and had little opportunity for social recreation, army men and women had leisure for a punctilious courtesy. The mule-drawn ambulance was a picturesque feature of the urban landscape as it bore the army women about the rough streets of the new cities; it was not elegant, but it was so eminently respectable! There might be an occasional colonel that was a snob, or a major that drank too much; or a Mrs. Colonel who was a trifle too conscious of her rights over her sisters at the Post, or a Mrs. Major whose syntax was unbearable; but the stars and stripes covered them all, even as

they cover worse people and worse errors in our civil administrators.

It gave Evelyn a pleasant sensation to find herself again in the little Whipple parlor. The furniture was the same that she remembered of old in the commandant's house at the fort. It had at last found repose, for the Whipples' marching days were over. They made an effort to have an Indian room, where they kept their books, but they refrained from calling the place a library. On the walls were the headdress of a Sioux chief, and a few colored photographs of red men; the couch was covered with a Navajo blanket, and on the floor were wolf and bear skins. When chairs were needed for callers, the general brought them in from other rooms; he himself sat in a canvas camp chair, which he said was more comfortable than any other kind, but which was prone to collapse under a civilian. The wastepaper-basket by the general's table, and a basket for fire-wood were of Indian make, dyed in dull shades of red and green.

"My dear child," Mrs. Whipple began, when Evelyn had explained her errand; "this is a very pretty compliment they're paying you,—don't you know that?"

"Yes, but I don't want it," declared the girl, with emphasis.

"That is wholly unreasonable. There are girls in Clarkson that could not afford to take it; the strength of your position is that you can afford to do it! It's not going to injure you in any way; can't you see that? Everybody knows all about you,—that you naturally wouldn't want it. Why, there's that Margrave girl, whose father does something or other in one of the rail-

ways,—she had this honor that is worrying you two years ago, and her father and all his friends worked hard to get it for her."

Evelyn laughed at her friend's earnestness. "I'm afraid you're trying to lift this to an impersonal plane, but I'm considering myself in this matter. I simply don't want to be mixed up in that kind of thing."

"These business men work awfully hard for all of us," Mrs. Whipple continued. "It seems to me that their daily business contests and troubles are fiercer than real wars. I'd a lot rather take my chances in the army than in commercial life,—if I were doing it all over again,—that is, from the woman's side. The government always gives us our bread if it can't supply the butter; and if the poor men lose a fight they are forgiven and we still eat. But in the business battle—" she shrugged her shoulders to indicate the sorry plight of the vanquished.

"Yes, I suppose that's all true," Evelyn conceded. "But you mustn't be so abstract! I really haven't a philosophical mind. I came here to ask you to tell me how to get out of this, but you seem to be urging me in!"

Mrs. Whipple rallied her forces while she poured the iced tea which a maid had brought.

"We can't always have our 'ruthers.' Now this looks like a very large sacrifice of comfort and dignity to you. I'll grant you the discomfort, but not any loss of dignity. If you were vain and foolish, I'd take your side, just to protect you, but you have no such weaknesses. You must not consider at all that girls in Eastern cities don't do such things; that's because there aren't the things to do. Our great-grandchildren won't be doing

them either. But these carnivals, and things like that, are necessary evils of our development. Army people like ourselves, who have always been cared for by a paternal government, can hardly appreciate the troubles of business people; and a girl like you, who has always led a carefully sheltered life, with both comforts and luxuries given her without the asking, must try to appreciate the fact that everybody is not so fortunate. I don't know whether these affairs are really of any advantage to the town commercially; I have heard business men say that they are not; but so long as they have them, the rest of us have got to submit to the confetti throwers and the country brass bands, on the theory that it's good for the town."

Mrs. Whipple covered all the ground when she talked. She had daringly addressed department commanders in this ample fashion when her husband was only a second lieutenant, and she was not easily driven from her position.

"But what's good for the town isn't necessarily good for me," pleaded Evelyn. Her animation was becoming, and Mrs. Whipple was noting the points of the girl's beauty with delight. "Any other girl's clothes would look just as sweet to the multitude," Evelyn asserted.

"That's where you are mistaken. If it's a sacrifice, the town is offering Iphigenia, and only our fairest daughter will do. I'll be talking fine language in a minute, and one of us will be lost." She laughed; Mrs. Whipple always laughed at herself at the right moment. She said it discounted the pleasure other people might have in laughing at her. "Now Evelyn Porter, you're a nice girl and a sensible one. So far as you can see

you're going to spend your days in this town, and it isn't a bad place. We preferred to live here after the general retired because we liked it, and that was when we had the world to choose from. I've lived in every part of this country, but the people in this region are simple and honest and wholesome, and they have human hearts in them, and at my age that counts for a good deal. The general and I were both born in Massachusetts, where you hear a lot about ancestors and background; but I've driven over these plains and prairies in an army ambulance, since before the Civil War, and it hasn't all been fun, either; I love every mile of the country, and I don't want you, who are the apple of my eye, to come home with patronizing airs—"

"Not guilty!" exclaimed Evelyn throwing up her hands in protest. "I have no such ideas and you know it; but you ignore the point. What I can't see is that there's any question of patriotism in this Knights of Midas affair, as far as I'm concerned, and I'm not so young as I was. The queen of the ball should be much younger than I am."

"Well, if you're reduced to that kind of argument, I think we'll have to call the debate closed. But remember,—you're asked to give only an hour of your life to please your father, and a great many other people. And you'll be doing your town a great service, too."

"Well," said Evelyn dolefully, as she got up to go, "this isn't the kind of counsel I came for. If I'd expected this from you, I'd have taken my troubles elsewhere." She had risen and stood swinging her parasol back and forth and regarding the tip of her boot. "You almost make it seem right."

"You'd better make a note of it as one of those things that are not pleasant, but necessary. If I thought it would harm you, child, I'd certainly warn you against it—I'd do that for your mother's sake."

"I like your saying that," said Evelyn, softly.

Mrs. Whipple had been a beauty in the old army days, and was still a handsome woman. She had retained the slenderness of her girlhood, and the hot suns and blighting winds of the plains and mountains had dealt gently with her. She took both of Evelyn's hands at the door, and kissed her.

"Don't go away hating me, dear. Come up often; and after it's all over, I'll tell you how good you've been."

"Oh, I'll go to a convent afterward," Evelyn answered; "that is, if I find that you've really persuaded me!"

CHAPTER VI

A SAFE MAN

James Wheaton was thirty-five years old, and was reckoned among the solid young business men of Clarkson. He had succeeded far beyond his expectations and was fairly content with the round of the ladder that he had reached. He never talked about himself and as he had no intimate friends it had never been necessary for him to give confidences. His father had been a harness-maker in a little Ohio town; he and his older brother were expected to follow the same business; but the brother grew restless under the threat of enforced apprenticeship and prevailed on James to run away with him. They became tramps and enjoyed themselves roaming through the country, until finally they were caught stealing in a little Illinois village and both were arrested.

James was discharged through the generosity of his brother in taking all the blame on himself; the older boy was sent to a reformatory alone. James then went to Chicago, where he sold papers and blacked boots for a year until he found employment as a train boy, with a company operating on various lines running out of Chicago. This gave him a wide acquaintance with western towns, and incidentally with railroads and

railroad men. He grew tired of the road, and obtained at Clarkson a position in the office of Timothy Margrave, the general manager of the Transcontinental, which, he had heard, was a great primary school for ambitious boys.

It was thus that his residence in Clarkson was established. He attended night school, was assiduous in his duties, and attained in due course the dignity of a desk at which he took the cards of Margrave's callers, indexed the letter books and copied figures under the direction of the chief clerk. After a year, hearing that one of the Clarkson National Bank's messengers was about to resign, he applied for this place. Margrave recommended him; the local manager of the news agency vouched for his integrity, and in due course he wended the streets of Clarkson with a long bill-book, the outward and visible sign of his position as messenger. He was steadily promoted in the bank and felt his past receding farther and farther behind him.

When, at an important hour of his life, Wheaton was promoted to be paying teller, he was in the receiving teller's cage. He had known that the more desirable position was vacant and had heard his fellow clerks speculating as to the possibility of a promotion from among their number. Thompson, the cashier, had a nephew in the bank; and among the clerks he was thought to have the best chance. They all knew that the directors were in session, and several whose tasks for the day were finished, lingered later than was their wont to see what would happen. Wheaton kept quietly at his work; but he had an eye on the door of the directors' room, and an ear that insensibly turned

toward the annunciator by which messengers were called to the board room. It rang at last, and Wheaton wiped his pen with a little more than his usual care as he waited for the result of the summons. This was on his twenty-fifth birthday.

"Mr. Wheaton!" The other clerks looked at one another. The question that had been uppermost with all of them for a week past was answered. Thompson's nephew slammed his book shut and carried it into the vault. Wheaton put aside the balance sheet over which he had been lingering and went into the directors' room. There had been no note of joy among his associates. He knew that he was not popular with them; he was not, in their sense, a good fellow. When they rushed off after hours to the ball games or horse races, he never joined them. When their books did not balance he never volunteered to help them. As for himself, he always balanced, and did not need their help; and they hated him for it. This was his hour of triumph, but he went to his victory without the cheer of his comrades.

He heard Mr. Porter's question as to whether he felt qualified to accept the promotion; and he sat patiently under the inquiries of the others as to his fitness. It required no great powers of intuition to know that these old men had already appointed him; that if they had not known to their own satisfaction that he was the best available man, they would not be taking advice from him in the matter.

"Sanders leaves on Monday to take another position, and we will put you in his cage to give you a trial," the president said, finally. Wheaton expressed his grati-

tude for this mark of confidence. He was not troubled by the suggestion of a trial. Porter and Thompson, the cashier, always spoke of his promotions as "trials." He had never failed thus far and his self-confidence was not disturbed by the care these men always took to tie strings to everything they did with a view to easy withdrawal, if the results were not satisfactory. The position had been filled and there was nothing more to be said. Thompson, however, always liked to have a last word.

"Wheaton, your family live here, don't they?"

"No," said Wheaton, smiling his difficult smile, "I haven't any family. My parents are dead. I came here from Ohio, and board over on the north side."

"Another Ohio man," said Porter, "you can't keep 'em down." They all laughed at Porter's joke and Wheaton bowed himself out under cover of it.

Later, when need arose for creating the position of assistant cashier, it was natural that the new desk should be assigned to Wheaton. He was faithful and competent; neither Porter nor Thompson had a son to install in the bank; and, as they said to each other and to their fellow directors, Wheaton had two distinguishing qualifications,—he did his work and he kept his mouth shut.

In the course of time Thompson's health broke down and the doctors ordered him away to New Mexico, and again there seemed nothing to do but to promote Wheaton. Thompson wished to sell his stock and resign, but Porter would not have it so; but when, after two years, it was clear that the cashier would never again be fit for continuous service in the bank, Wheaton was

duly elected cashier and Thompson was made vice-president.

Wheaton had now been in Clarkson fifteen years, and he was well aware that other young men, with influential connections, had not done nearly so well as he. He treasured no illusions as to his abilities; he did not think he had a genius for business; but he had demonstrated to his own satisfaction that such qualities as he possessed,—industry, sobriety and obedience,—brought results, and with these results he was well satisfied. He hoped some day to be rich, but he was content to make haste slowly. He never speculated. He read in the newspapers every day of men holding responsible positions who embezzled and absconded, but there was never any question in his mind as between honesty and knavery. It irritated him when these occurrences were commented on facetiously before him; he did not relish jokes which carried an implication that he too might belong to the dubious cashier class; and inquiries as to whether he would spend his vacation in Canada or, if it were winter, in Guatemala, were not received in good part, for he had much personal dignity and little humor. He was counted among the older men of the town rather than among men of his own age, and he found himself much more at ease among his seniors. The young men appreciated his good qualities and respected him; but he felt that he was not one of them; socially, he was voted very slow, and there was an impression abroad that he was stingy. Certainly he did not spend his money frivolously, and he never had done so. Many fathers held him up as an example to their sons, and this tended further to the creation of a feeling among

his contemporaries that he was lacking in good fellowship.

Raridan knew the personal history of most of his fellow townsmen, and he was fond of characterizing those whom he particularly liked or disliked, for the benefit of his friends. He took it upon himself to sketch Wheaton for John Saxton's benefit in this fashion.

"Jim Wheaton's one of those men who never make mistakes," said Raridan, with the scorn of a man whose own mistakes do not worry him. "He went into that bank as a boy, and was first a model messenger, and then a model clerk; and when they had to have a cashier there was the model assistant, who had been a model everything else, so they put him in. There wasn't anybody else for the job; and I guess he's a good man for it, too. A bank cashier doesn't dare to make mistakes; and as Wheaton is not of that warm, emotional nature that would lead him to lend money without getting something substantial to hold before the borrower got away, he's the model cashier. You've heard of those bank cashiers who can refuse a loan to a man and send him out of the bank singing happy chants. Well, Jim isn't that kind. When he turns down a man, the man doesn't go on his way rejoicing. I don't know how much money Wheaton's got. He's made something, of course, and Porter would probably sell him stock up to a certain point. He'll die rich, and nobody, I fancy, will ever be any gladder because he's favored this little old earth with his presence."

As a bank clerk the teller's cage had shut Wheaton off from the world. Young women of social distinction

who came sometimes to get checks cashed, knew him as a kind of automaton, that looked at both sides of their checks and at themselves, and then passed out coin and paper to them; they saw him nowhere else, and did not bother themselves about him. After his promotion to be assistant cashier, he saw the world closer at hand. He had a desk and could sit down and talk to the men whom he had studied from the cage for so long. The young women, too, approached him no longer with checks to be cashed, but with little books in which they urged him officially and personally to subscribe to charities. Porter, who was naturally a man of generous impulses, knew his own weakness and made the cashier the bank's almoner. He was very sure that Wheaton would be as careful of the bank's money as of his own; he had taken judicial knowledge of the fact that Wheaton's balance on the bank's books had shown a marked and steady growth through all the years of his connection with it.

Wheaton's promotion to the cashiership had come in the spring; and shortly afterward he had changed his way of living in a few particulars. He had lodged for years in a boarding house frequented by clerks; a place where his fellow boarders were, among others, a music teacher, a milliner and the chief operator of the telephone exchange. He had not felt above them; their dancing class and occasional theater party had seemed fine to him. Porter now suggested that Wheaton should be a member of the Clarkson Club, and Wheaton assented, on the president's representation that "it would be a good thing for the bank." Vacant apartments were offered at this time in The Bachelors', as it was called, and he availed himself of the opportunity to

change his place of residence. He had considered the matter of taking a room at the club, but this, after reflection, he rejected as unwise. The club was a new institution in the town, and he was aware that there were conservative people in Clarkson who looked on it as a den of iniquity,—with what justification he did not know from personal experience, but he had heard it referred to in this way at the boarding house table. He knew Raridan and the others at The Bachelors', but his acquaintance with them was of a perfunctory business character. When he moved to The Bachelors', Raridan, who was always punctilious in social matters, formally called on him in his room, as did also Captain Wheelock, the army officer then stationed in Clarkson on recruiting service. The others in the house welcomed him less formally as they chanced to meet him in the hall or on the stairway; they were busy men who worked long hours and did not bother themselves about the amenities and graces of life.

His change to The Bachelors' was of importance to Wheaton in many ways. He saw here, in the intimacies of their common table, men of a higher social standing than he had known before. Their way of chaffing one another seemed to him very bright; they mocked at the gods and were not destroyed. Raridan was a new species and spoke a strange tongue. Raridan and Wheelock appeared at the table in dinner-coats, and after a few weeks Wheaton followed their example. Raridan, he knew, dressed whether he went out or not, and he established his own habit in this particular with as little delay as possible. The table then balanced, the smelter manager, the secretary of the terra cotta manufacturing

company, and the traveling passenger agent of the Transcontinental Railroad appearing in the habiliments which they wore at their respective places of business, and Raridan, Wheaton and Wheelock in black and white.

The humor of this division was not lost on the traveling passenger agent, who chaffed the "glad rag" faction, as he called it, until Raridan took up arms for his own side of the table.

"It may be true, sir, what you say about a division here between the working and non-working classes; but wit and beauty have from most ancient times bedecked themselves in robes of purity. A man like yourself, whose business is to persuade people to ride on the worst railroad on earth, should properly array himself in sackcloth and ashes, and not in purple and fine linen, which belong to those who severally give their thoughts to the,—er—promotion of peace"—indicating Wheelock—"sound finances," indicating Wheaton, "and—er—in my own case—"

"Yes, do tell us," said the railroad man, ironically.

"To faith and good works," said Warrick imperturbably.

"And mostly works,—I don't think!" declared Wheelock.

The relations between Porter and Wheaton were strictly of a business character. This was not by intention on Porter's part. He assumed that at some time he or Thompson had known all about Wheaton's antecedents; and after so many years of satisfactory service, during the greater part of which the bank had been protected against Wheaton, as against all the rest of the

employees, by a bonding company, he accepted the cashier without any question. Before Evelyn's return he had one day expressed to Wheaton his satisfaction that he would soon have a home again, and Wheaton remarked with civil sympathy that Miss Porter must now be "quite a young lady."

"Oh, yes; you must come up to the house when we get going again," Porter answered.

Wheaton had seen the inside of few houses in Clarkson. He had a recollection of having been sent to Porter's several times, while he was still an errand boy in the bank, to fetch Porter's bag on occasions when the president had been called away unexpectedly. He remembered Evelyn Porter as she used to come as a child and sit in the carriage outside the bank to wait for her father; the Porters stood to him then, and now, for wealth and power.

Raridan had a contempt for Wheaton's intellectual deficiencies; and praise of Wheaton's steadiness and success vexed him as having some sting for himself; but his own amiable impulses got the better of his prejudices, and he showed Wheaton many kindnesses. When the others at The Bachelors' nagged Wheaton, it was Raridan who threw himself into the controversy to take Wheaton's part. He took him to call at some of the houses he knew best, and though this was a matter of propinquity he knew nevertheless that he preferred Wheaton to the others in the house. Wheaton was not noisy nor pretentious and the others were sometimes both.

Wheaton soon found it easy to do things that he had never thought of doing before. He became known

to the florist and the haberdasher; there was a little Hambletonian at a certain liveryman's which Warry Raridan drove a good deal, and he had learned from Warry how pleasant it was to drive out to the new country club in a runabout instead of using the street car, which left a margin of plebeian walking at the end of the line. He had never smoked, but he now made it a point to carry cigarettes with him. Raridan and many other young men of his acquaintance always had them; he fancied that the smoking of a cigarette gave a touch of elegance to a gentleman. Captain Wheelock smoked cigarettes which bore his own monogram, and as he said that these did not cost any more than others of the same brand, Wheaton allowed the captain to order some for him. But while he acquired the superficial graces, he did not lose his instinctive thrift; he had never attempted to plunge, even on what his associates at The Bachelors' called "sure things"; and he was equally incapable of personal extravagances. If he bought flowers he sent them where they would tell in his favor. If he had five dollars to give to the *Gazette's* Ice Fund for the poor, he considered that when the newspaper printed his name in its list of acknowledgments, between Timothy Margrave, who gave fifty dollars, and William Porter, who gave twenty-five, he had received an adequate return on his investment.

A few days after Evelyn Porter came home, Wheaton followed Raridan to his room one evening after dinner. Raridan had set The Bachelors' an example of white flannels for the warm weather, and Wheaton also had abolished his evening clothes. Raridan's rooms had not yet lost their novelty for him. The pictures, the stat-

uettes, the books, the broad couch with its heap of varicolored pillows, the table with its candelabra, by which Raridan always read certain of the poets,—these still had their mystery for Wheaton.

"Going out to-night?" he asked with a show of indifference.

"Hadn't thought of it," answered Raridan, who was cutting the pages of a magazine. "Kick the cat off the couch there, won't you?—it's that blessed Chinaman's beast. Don't know what a Mongolian is doing with a cat,—Egyptian bird, isn't it?"

"Don't let me interrupt if you're reading," said Wheaton. "But I thought some of dropping in at Mr. Porter's. Miss Porter's home now, I believe."

"That's a good idea," said Raridan, who saw what was wanted. He threw his magazine at the cat and got up and yawned. "Suppose we do go?"

The call had been successfully managed. Miss Porter was very pretty, and not so young as Wheaton expected to find her. Raridan left him talking to her and went across to the library, where Mr. Porter was reading his evening paper. Raridan had a way of wandering about in other people's houses, which Wheaton envied him. Miss Porter seemed to take his call as a matter of course, and when her father came out presently and greeted him casually as if he were a familiar of the house he felt relieved and gratified.

CHAPTER VII

WARRY RARIDAN'S INDIGNATION

Raridan stayed in town all summer, and he and Saxton saw a good deal of each other. They drove often to the country club together, and Saxton became, as people said, another of Warry's enthusiasms. Saxton was no idler, and he was conscientiously striving to bring order out of chaos in the interests which had been confided to him. He was annoyed, at first, when Raridan in his unlimited leisure, began to invade his office; but as the confidence and ease of real friendship grew between them he did not scruple to send him away, or to throw him a newspaper and bid him read and keep still. Raridan was the plaything of many moods; Saxton was equable and steady. They sought each other with the old perversity of antipodal natures.

Saxton came in unexpectedly on Raridan at The Bachelors' one evening in September. The day had been hot with the final fling of summer, but a thunder shower had cooled the atmosphere, and there stole in pleasantly the drip, drip, of the rain which was now abating. Heat lightning glowed in the west with the luminousness so marked in that region.

"It's an infernal, hideous shame," called Raridan fiercely through the dark, recognizing Saxton's step.

"Thanks! I'm glad I came," said Saxton, cheerfully.

"I'd like to be a cannibal for a few hours," growled Raridan, kicking a chair toward Saxton without rising from the couch where he lay sprawled. Saxton went about quietly, lighting the gas, picking up the books and newspapers which Raridan had evidently cast from him in his rage, and making a seat for himself by the window.

"I'm not an expert in lunacy, but I'll hear your trouble. Go ahead."

Raridan got up suddenly, his glasses swinging wildly from their cord.

"Put out that light," he commanded savagely; and Saxton did as he was bidden.

"Do you know what Evelyn Porter's going to do?" demanded Raridan.

"I certainly do not. You seem to want to leave me in the dark; and that's no joke."

"She's going to be queen of their infernal Knights of Midas ball, that's what."

"Your language is spirited, I must say. I think we may classify that as important if true."

"It's an outrage; an infernal damned shame!" Raridan went on.

"Language unbecoming an officer and a gentleman—"

"There's a fine girl, as charming as any girl dare be. She has a father who doesn't appreciate her;—a good fellow and all that and he wouldn't hurt her for anything on earth; but he hasn't got any sensibility; that's the trouble with scores of American fathers. These Western ones are worse than any others. They break

their sons in, whenever they can, to the same collars they've worn themselves. Their daughters they usually don't understand at all! They intimidate their wives so that the poor things don't dare call their souls their own; but the women are the saving remnant out here. And when a particularly fine one turns up she ought to be protected from the curse of our infernal commercialism."

He threw himself into a chair and lighted a cigarette.

Saxton laughed silently.

"Isn't this a new responsibility you've taken on? I don't believe these things are as bad as you make them out to be. The commercial curse is one of the things you can't dodge these days. It's just as bad in Boston as it is here; and you find it wherever you find live people who want bread to eat and cake if they can get it."

"But to visit the curse on a girl,—a fine girl,—"

"A pretty girl,—" Saxton suggested.

"A really charming girl," continued Warrick, with unabated earnestness, "is a rotten shame."

"I'm afraid you're taking it too seriously," said Saxton. "If Miss Porter were not a very sensible young woman it would be different. You don't think for a moment that she would have her head turned—"

"No, sir; not a bit of it; but it's the principle of the thing that I'm kicking about. This is one of the things that I detest in these Western towns. It's the inability to escape from their infernal business. On the face of it their Midas ball is a social event, but at the bottom, it's merely a business venture. All the business men have

got to go in for it, but it doesn't stop there; they must drag their families in. Evelyn Porter has got to mix up with the daughters of the plumbers and the candlestick makers in order that the god of commerce may be satisfied."

"You don't quite grasp the situation," said Saxton. "If you had to get out among these men who have hard work to do every day you'd have a different feeling about such things. They've got to make the town go, and this carnival is one of the ways in which they can stir things up commercially, and at the same time give pleasure to a whole lot of people."

"Now look here, you know as well as I do that you can't mix up all sorts and conditions of men, and particularly women, in this way, without making a mess of it. A man may introduce the green grocer at the corner, and all that kind of ruck, to his wife and daughter, but what's the good of it?"

"Well, what's the good of a democracy anyhow?" demanded Saxton. "I used to have those ideas, too, when I was younger, but I thought it all over when I was herding cattle up in Wyoming and I renounced such notions for all time, even before I went broke. I found when I got back East that I carried my new convictions with me, and the sight of civilized people and good food did not change me."

"Well, the girl oughtn't to be sacrificed anyhow," said Warrick, spitefully.

Saxton bit his pipe hard and grinned.

"Look here, Raridan, I'm afraid it's the girl and not the philosophy of the thing that's worrying you.

Why didn't you tell me it was the girl, and not the social fabric generally, that you want to defend?"

Both Saxton and Raridan were a good deal at the Porters'. He knew that Raridan had been a playmate of Evelyn's in their youth, when the elder Porters and Raridans had been friends and neighbors. There existed between them the lighthearted camaraderie that young people carry from youth to maturity, and it had touched Saxton with envy. As a man having no fixed duties, Raridan sometimes went, in the middle of the hot mornings, to the Porter hilltop, where it was pleasant to sit and talk to a pretty girl and look down on the seething caldron below, when every other man of the community was sweltering at the business of earning his daily bread.

"You oughtn't to get so violent about these things," Saxton went on to say. "You will yourself be one of the ornaments of the show, and you will dance before the throne and be glad of the chance. They have a king, don't they? You might get the job. Who's going to be king, by the way?"

"Wheaton, I fancy; the announcement hasn't been made yet."

"Oh," said Saxton, significantly. "Is this a little jealousy? Are we sorry that we're not to wear the royal robes ourself? Well! well, I begin to understand!"

"I don't like that either, if you want to know. It all gets back to the accursed commercial idea. Wheaton's the cashier in Porter's bank. It's very fitting that the president's daughter and the young and brilliant cashier should be identified together in a public function like this. No doubt Wheaton is fixing it up."

"Well, why don't you fix it up? I have been deluding myself with the idea that you were a person of consequence in this town, yet you admit that in a mere trifling social matter you are outwitted, or about to be, by one of these commercial persons you hate so much, or say you do."

He spoke tauntingly, but Raridan was evidently serious in his complaint, and Saxton turned the talk into other channels. The Chinese servant came in presently with a card for Raridan.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, "it's Bishop Delafield." He plunged downstairs and returned immediately with a man whose great figure loomed darkly in the doorway.

Raridan made a light.

"We've been doing the dim, religious act here," he said, after introducing Saxton. "The lightning out there has been fine."

"You feel that you can't trust me in the dark," said the bishop; "or perhaps that I won't appreciate the 'dim religious,' as you call it. Turn down the gas and save my feelings."

Saxton was well acquainted with Warrick's zeal in church matters and was not surprised to find a church dignitary in his friend's rooms. He had never met the Bishop of Clarkson before, and he was a little awe-struck at the heroic size of this man who had just given him so masculine a grasp of the hand and so keen a scrutiny.

The bishop extended his vast bulk in Raridan's easiest chair, and accepted a cigar from the box which Warry passed to him.

"You've come just in time to save us from fierce con-

tentions," said Raridan, all amiability once more, while the bishop lighted his cigar. He was very bald, and his head shone so radiantly that Saxton felt that he could still see it in the dark after Warrick had turned down the lights. There was an atmosphere about the man of great physical strength, and his deep-set eyes under their shaggy brows were quick and penetrating. Here was a man famous in his church for the energy and sacrifice which he had brought to the work of a missionary in one of the great Western dioceses. He had been bereft, in his young manhood, of his wife and children, and had thereafter offered himself for the roughest work of his church. He was sixty years old and for twenty years had been a bishop, first in a vast region of the farther Northwest, where the diocesan limits were hardly known, and where he had traveled ponyback and muleback until called to be the Bishop of Clarkson. He was famous as a preacher, and when he appeared from time to time in the pulpits of Eastern churches, he swayed men mightily by the vigor and simplicity of his eloquence. He had, in his younger days, been reckoned a scholar, but the study of humanity at close hand had superseded long ago his interest in books and learning. He had a deep, melodious voice and there was charm and magnetism in him, as many people of many sorts and conditions knew.

"What's the subject, gentlemen?" he asked, smoking contentedly. "I'm sure something very serious must be before the house."

"Mr. Raridan has been abusing the commercialism of his neighbors," said Saxton.

"Saxton's a new-comer, Bishop, and doesn't under-

stand the situation here as you and I do. You know that I'm the only native that dares to hold honest opinions. The rest all follow the crowd."

"Reformers always have a hard time of it," said the bishop. "If you're going to make over your fellowmen, you'll have to get hardened to their indifference. But what's the matter with things to-night; and what are you gentlemen doing in town, anyway? Aren't there places to go where it's cool and where there are pretty girls to enchant you?"

Raridan attacked the bishop about some question of ritual that was agitating the English Church. It was worse than Greek to Saxton, but Raridan seemed fully informed about it, and turned up the lights to read a paragraph from an English church paper which was, he protested, rankly heretical. The bishop smoked his cigar calmly until Raridan had finished.

"They tell me," he said, when Raridan had concluded by flinging the whole matter upon his clerical caller with an air of arraigning the entire episcopate, "that you're a pretty fair lawyer, Warry, only you won't work. And I hear occasionally that you're about to embrace the ministry. Now, just think what a time I'd have with you on my hands! You couldn't get the water hot enough for me. Isn't he ungracious"—turning to Saxton—"when I came here for rest and recreation, to put me on trial for my life? You ought to know, young man, that a bishop can be tried only by his peers."

Raridan threw down his paper, and rang for the Chinaman.

"When I embrace the ministry under you, Bishop, you may be sure that I'll be humble enough to be good."

The Chinaman brought a variety of liquids, from which they helped themselves.

"Don't be afraid of the Scotch, Saxton," said Raridan, "the bishop has seen the bottle before."

The bishop, who was pouring seltzer on his lemon juice, smiled tolerantly at Raridan's chatter, with whose temper and quality he had long been familiar, and addressed himself to Saxton. He liked young men, and had an agreeable way of drawing them out and making them talk about themselves. When it was disclosed that Saxton had been in the cattle business, the bishop showed an intimate knowledge of the range and its ways.

"You see, the bishop's ridden over most of the cattle country in his day," explained Raridan.

"And evidently not all in Pullman cars," said Saxton.

"I'm considered a heavy load for a cow pony," said the bishop, smiling down at his great bulk, "so they used sometimes to find a mule for me."

"How are the Porters?" he asked presently of Raridan.

"Very well, and staying on in the heat with the usual Clarkson fortitude."

"Porter's one of the men that never rest," said the bishop. "I've known him ever since I've known the West, and he's taken few vacations in that time."

"Well, he's showing signs of wear," said Raridan. "He's one of the men who begin with a small business where they do all the work themselves, and when the business outgrows them, they never realize that they need help, or that they can have any. Before they made Wheaton cashier, Porter carried the whole bank in his

head. He's improving a little, and has a stenographer now; but he's nervous and anxious all the while and terribly fussy over all he does."

"Wheaton ought to be a great help to him," said the bishop. "He seems a steady fellow, hard working and industrious."

"Oh, he's all those things," Raridan answered carelessly. "He'll never steal anybody's money."

The bishop talked directly to Raridan about some work which it seemed the young man had done for him, and rose to go. He had been in town only a few hours, after a business journey to New York, and on reaching his rooms had found a summons calling him to a neighboring jurisdiction, to perform episcopal functions for a brother bishop who was ill. Saxton and Warrick went down to the car with him, carrying the battered suit cases which contained his episcopal robes and personal effects. These cases showed rough usage; they had been to Canterbury and had found lodging many nights in the sod houses of the plains.

"How do you like him?" asked Raridan, as the bishop climbed into a street car headed toward the station.

"He looks like the real thing," said Saxton. "He has a voice and a beard like a prophet."

"He's a fine character,—one of the people that understand things without being told. A few men and women in the world have that kind of instinct. They're put here, I guess, to help those who don't understand themselves."

CHAPTER VIII

TIMOTHY MARGRAVE MAKES A CHOICE

There was a tradition that no one had ever been black-balled in the Knights of Midas, so when Timothy Margrave got Wheaton's signature to an application for membership the cashier was beset by no fear of rejection. The citizens of Clarkson were indebted to Margrave for many schemes for booming their town. He lectured his fellow business men constantly about their lack of enterprise.

"Look at Kansas City," he would say at the club, bending forward ponderously on his fat knees, "they ain't got half the terminal facilities that we have, and there ain't any better country around 'em, but they're bigger than we are and ahead of us because they've got more hustle than we have; and hustle's what makes a town,—look at Chicago! But we've got a lot of salt mackerel business men here, so pickled in their brine of conservatism that they won't do anything. There's Billy Porter; when we want to raise money to help boom the town, I'm always dead sure that Billy will cough up, but you've got to show 'im;—tell 'im all about it, and he likes to play with you and guy you and rub it in before he puts his name down. Now he may be a safe banker and all that, but I say that there's

such a thing as pushing conservatism too damned far. We're going to be a long time getting over the panic and we've got to give a strong pull and all pull together if we get in the procession." His voice rose as he proceeded. "Look at little Sioux City! busted wide open and knocked over the ropes, but here they come waltzing up again, as full of sass as a fox terrier with a flea on his tail. Talk about grit, the time a man wants to show that article's when he's busted. Any fool can be cheerful on a bull market."

Then he would settle himself back with an air of complacency, as if he had done all that he could do to arrest decay in the town; if his fellow citizens failed to rouse themselves it was not his fault. Margrave held no office in the Knights of Midas, but this was because he had learned by political experience that it was much simpler to lurk in the background and manipulate the men he placed in power. It was on this high principle that he built up the order of the Knights of Midas and directed its course from the office of the general manager of the Transcontinental. There was nothing incongruous to him in the annual ball, which was the only public social manifestation of the organization. It was he who directed that twenty members be chosen from the membership list each year, to conduct the purely social functions of the ball, and that these be taken in alphabetical order. Thus the Adamses and the Bakers and the Cummingses, who belonged in different constellations, found themselves in the same orbit. If they were unacquainted or were enemies of long standing, this did not trouble Margrave when the fact

was brought to his notice. It was time, he said, that the people of Clarkson got together.

"We may as well get some work out of Jim Wheaton," he remarked to the grand chief of the Knights of Midas. "He's pretty solemn, but Jim was solemn when he was a kid and worked for me. Porter and Thompson have always been too slow for this earth and if we pull Wheaton in, it may wake up the old chaps so they'll do something besides sit on the fence and watch the rest of us hustle."

"See here," said Norton, the grand chief, "what's the matter with shoving him in for the king of the carnival? We've got to make a strong push this year to give tone to the show socially; that's the only way we can keep up the town interest. Having these jays come in from the country won't do any good unless we can hold these eminently respectable people who think they're Clarkson society."

"You're dead right on that point," said Margrave; "that's a big card with the jays,—they think they come to town and get right in the push and are tickled to pay ten dollars a ticket for a taste of high life. I tell you what we'll do, we'll get Porter to let his daughter appear as queen of the carnival, and if that ain't a big enough jolly, we can make Wheaton king. That's what I'd call giving the Clarkson National a run for its money. If Porter don't double his subscription on the strength of that—"

He looked at Norton and they both laughed.

A few days later Margrave called on Wheaton at the bank. He was a little proud of having discovered

Wheaton. Since his quondam messenger had become a bank cashier he had begun to take notice of him.

"I guess we're going to need you to take a star part in the carnival this year," he said, leading him into the empty directors' room and looking carefully about to make sure that they were alone. "You see, we've been casting about to find a good representative from among the younger business men to take the part of king in the carnival. The board of control are unanimous that you're the man."

"But I've just gone into the Knights,—there are plenty of older members."

"That's the point! we want new men and you're just the fellow we're after."

He had been holding his hat in his hand and wiping his brow with his handkerchief, and he now backed toward the door, saying, without leaving Wheaton time for further quibble:

"Keep it mum. You understand about that; we always want to jar the public. We'll put you on to the curves all right."

"I'm sure I'm very much surprised," said Wheaton, "but—"

"Oh, it's all fixed," said Margrave, moving off. "You're the only one and we never let anybody decline. It would knock all the compliment out of it, if we let two or three fellows refuse before we caught one that would accept."

Wheaton went back to his desk, surprised and flattered. Margrave's good will was worth having. Wheaton had never outgrown the impression he formed of Margrave when, as a boy, he had indexed letter

books and received callers in the general manager's outer office. He knew that Mr. Porter was more respectable and stood higher in the community, but there was something that took hold of even Wheaton's dull imagination in the bolder achievements of Timothy Margrave, who rolled over the country in a private car, dictating, when need arose, to the legislatures of a chain of states, and looming large in the press's discussions of those combinations and contests of transportation companies which marked the last years of the nineteenth century. Wheaton had acquired a banker's habitual distrust of men who offer favors; but as this came on the personal invitation of one who had no dealings with his bank he could see no harm in accepting.

Margrave winked at him a few days later when they met at the club.

"The boys are all glad you're going to lead the show, Jim," said the general manager; and Wheaton experienced a feeling of having fallen into the larger currents of Clarkson life. Margrave was the man who, more than any other, made things happen in Clarkson.

CHAPTER IX

PARLEYINGS

Evelyn acted on her father's suggestion that she ask some friends to visit her, and she summoned two of her classmates to come out for the carnival. She told Raridan of their coming one evening when they were alone, and he began propounding inquiries about them with the zealous interest, half mocking and half earnest, which he always manifested in girls that crossed his horizon.

"And Miss Warren—is she the one from Dedham Crossing, Connecticut? Yes, I suppose they will want to go right out to see the Indians. I'll see if the War Department won't lend us a few from a reservation to show off with. It's too bad for our guests to be disappointed. And Miss Marshall—she's from Virginia? It will really be rather amusing to bring the types together on our rude frontier."

"But you're not to play tricks with these friends of mine, Warrick Raridan. You are to be very nice to them, but you are not to make too much of an impression—unless—!"

"I'm afraid Miss Warren's a trifle too serious for human nature's daily food," he said, complainingly.

"Yes? I remember that she was strong in entomology.

She surely knows a moth from a bumblebee when she sees it."

"Tut! tut! One shouldn't be spiteful. Miss Warren is a nice girl. She knows where the pussy willows purr first in the harsh Connecticut spring. She is strong on golden rod and ah-tum leaves; she reads 'Sesame and Lilies' once a week, and Channing's 'Symphony' hangs in her room in blue and gold. She's very sweet with her Sunday School class. She shall be saluted with the Chautauqua salute—thus!" He flourished his handkerchief at a picture on the wall.

"How brutal! Deliver me from the cynical man! By the way, Warry, I saw Minnie Metchen in New York this spring, and she asked me all the questions about you she dared. That really wasn't good of you. She hadn't been an army girl long—her father was a new paymaster, or something like that; she wasn't fair game. You were her first, and she thought you meant it all,—the poems and the flowers and all that kind of thing. She thought you were very good, too. You remember, I hope, that you dragged her across town to that colored mission where you were lay-reading at the time. Now, you mustn't do that any more."

Raridan buried his face in his hands and groaned.

"My sins are more than I can bear. But I'm really disappointed in you. It isn't good form in this town to remember from one winter to another what my enthusiasms have been. But, Evelyn—"

His manner changed suddenly and he rose and walked the floor. He was so full of mockery, and his fun took so many unexpected turns, that Evelyn, who had known him from his wilful, spoiled childhood, was never sure

of his moods. He seemed very serious as he stood before her with his arms folded and looked at her. His voice broke a little as he said:

"Evelyn, I don't want you to remember this kind of thing of me. Nobody takes me seriously; I'm getting tired of it. I'm all kinds of a failure. I ought to be doing things, like all the other men here. Maybe it's too late—"

"No, it's never too late to do what we want to do, Warry," she said very kindly. "But I don't know that you're such a failure." She was still on guard for some flash of the joke that he was always playing.

"But it's a question with me whether I haven't lost my chance," he persisted. He sat down, dejectedly. Then he laughed.

"Do you know why I'm like the Juniata River?" he demanded.

"I'm not good at guessing," she answered, wondering whether he was laying a trap for her.

"Why, Captain Wheelock told somebody that it was because I am very beautiful and very shallow." He did not laugh with her.

"Those things aren't funny to me any more," he declared, scowling.

"But to be called beautiful—"

"No man is beautiful," he returned savagely. "No man wants to be called that. It's my eye-glasses, I suppose." He took them off and played with them. "Maybe they do make me look dudish. I'd wear spectacles if they didn't cut my ears. Or I might go without and come to a sudden end by walking over some lonely

precipice." He expected her to remonstrate, but she said:

"Well, I'll promise not to tell the new visitors about you;" as if, of course, this was what he had been leading up to.

"I don't care anything about them."

"I'm sorry. I had rather counted on you, as the only person here who has met them,—and an old friend of the family."

He stood up again.

"But I don't want to be your friend—"

"Oh!" She seized and fortified all the strategic positions. "This is certainly surprising in you, Warrick Raridan, after all the years I've known you. I didn't expect to be renounced so early." He stood looking at her quizzically, and too fixedly for her comfort.

"Tragedy doesn't become the Juniata type of beauty. You'd better sit down." He had been pacing the floor, but now threw himself into a chair.

"That chair," she continued, "is a relic of the Inquisition. If you'll move those cushions about a little on the divan you'll be a lot more comfortable."

He mumbled that he didn't want to be comfortable, but obeyed.

"Now, if you'll be good," she went on tranquilly, folding her arms and looking at him benignantly, "I'll tell you a secret."

He had thrust his hands into his pockets and sat watching her sulkily.

"Well?"

"I'm to be queen of the ball, sir, I'm to be queen of the ball."

"I'm sorry I can't congratulate you," he said grimly. "You have no business mixing up with their infernal idiocy. I've been expecting to hear that you'd refused." He grew hot as he went on. "Your father oughtn't to make you do such a thing."

"Warry!" She sat up straight and bent toward him in an attitude of remonstrance; "you really mustn't! Why, I'm amazed at you!"

The enormity of the thing, as Raridan saw it, had grown on him since his talk with Saxton, and he did not relent; but he relaxed his severity for the moment, to assume an aggrieved air.

"Maybe I'm presuming too far on old acquaintance!" he said gloomily.

"I still have that copy of Aldrich you gave me once,—you remember that they

> 'Met as acquaintances meet,
> Smiling, tranquil-eyed—
> Not even the least little beat
> Of the heart, upon either side!'

But,—should old acquaintance be forgot?" she hummed. He was still a spoilt boy who had to be coaxed into good humor.

"You know what I mean, Evelyn. I feel a particular interest in having you start right here, now that you've come home to stay. People will be surprised to hear of your taking a part like that; they want to take you seriously. You've been to college—"

"Oh, Warry!" she cried appealingly. "And are you to throw this at me? A few minutes ago you were complaining that people wouldn't take you seriously,

but I'm afraid they want to take me much too seriously. I don't like it! In fact, I don't intend to have it!"

"But you don't mean to get down to a level with these girls who've been ground out of boarding schools, and who don't know anything? The kind that play badly on the piano, or sing worse, and come home to mix Fifth Avenue boarding school with Missouri River every-day life!"

"I'm really disappointed in you. I supposed you weren't like the others. A few days ago some estimable women called here to get me to become a candidate for school commissioner. They talked beautifully to me. There was one of them, a Miss Morris—" Raridan extended his arms to Heaven, as if imploring mercy—"who told me that I was a bachelor of arts and that all kinds of things were therefore to be expected of me."

"But I don't mean that! It's just that sort of thing I think you ought to keep free from,—it's this awful publicity; it's making yourself public property! Women must keep out of such things. School commissioner!" His spirits were rising again and he laughed aloud.

"Wouldn't you vote for me?"

He stared. "You're not going to—"

"Decidedly not. I want you to understand, and everybody to find out that I'm a very ordinary being. I hope if I've learned anything in college it's common sense. I don't feel a bit interested in regulating the universe, or in getting more rights for women, or in politics of any kind, any more than every sane woman is interested in such things. About this carnival and the ball, I don't mind telling you that I dislike it par-

ticularly. But I'm going to do it for two reasons, to be much franker with you than you deserve; to please father, for whom I can do very little, and to set at rest this idea about my being a divinely gifted individual who has come home from college to rub up the universe with a witch cloth. And now, Warrick Raridan, we will, if you please, consider the incident closed; and if you are very good you may dance with me at the ball."

"Oh, the noble king will have first place there."

"Well, if you're the king you can't object," she said. "I'm sure I don't know who the king's to be—"

"Well, I do—"

"Then you needn't tell me, please. I want to be surprised."

"But he's likely to be somebody you won't care to know under any circumstances," he persisted. His contempt for the carnival and his rage at the thought of this girl being publicly identified with Wheaton rose in him and he grew morose again. Evelyn, seeing another storm approaching and wishing to restore his good humor, returned to her expected guests and her plans for entertaining them.

It must be confessed that in her heart Evelyn was one of those who, in Raridan's own phrase, did not take him seriously. She had seen more of him than of any other man. She had a great fondness for him, and she was glad to find that after her absences he always came to the house as if there had been no break, and took up their pleasant comradeship where they had left it. She had speculated not a little as to the violent flirtations which he carried on so openly, and had wondered whether he would sometime grow serious in one of them,

and what manner of girl would finally steady him and win him to a real affection. She did not understand the mood that had swayed him, or that seemed about to sway him to-night; but a woman's natural instinct in such matters had warned her that he wanted to change their old attitude toward each other, and she knew that she did not want to change it. She liked his gentleness, his humor and his generous impulses. She had seen enough of the world to know that the qualities which set him apart from most men were rare. His likings in themselves were unusual, and though they were not sincere enough for his own good, they constituted an element of charm in him. His easy susceptibility was amusing; and it was no more marked in flirtations with girls than in dallyings with books or pictures or music. He was certainly a delightful companion, almost as satisfactory to talk to as a bright girl! She felt, though, that there was a real power in him; she could dramatize him in situations where he would be a leader of forlorn hopes on battlefields; but she stopped short of loving him; she had, she told herself, no idea of loving any one now; but neither did she wish to lose a friend who was so entirely agreeable and charming. She resolved as they sat talking of perfectly safe matters, that their old footing must be maintained, and she felt confident that she could manage this.

"Don't you like John Saxton very much?" he asked, and she felt that the day was saved when he would talk of another man. "I like him better all the time."

"Yes; people are saying agreeable things about him. But he's pretty serious, isn't he?"

"Well, that makes him a good companion for me, you

know. Acute gaiety is diagnosed as my chief trouble," he said, a little bitterly. He was trying to feel his way back to the talk of an hour ago, but she had resolved not to have it so.

"It's very nice of you to be kind to him."

"If you mean that I bring him up here, that isn't kindness, it's just ordinary decent humanity."

He was cheerful again, and he went away assuring her that he would be at the station to meet the approaching visitors the following afternoon. He abused himself, as he went down the hill toward the electric lights of the city, for having permitted Evelyn to defeat him in what he had intended to say. He stopped on the long viaduct that spanned the railway tracks and looked moodily down on the lights of the switch targets and the signal lanterns of the trainmen. Then he turned his eyes toward the Porter house which stood darkly against the starlit sky among the trees. As he looked a light flashed suddenly in the tower. He laughed softly to himself as he turned with a quickened step on his way.

"Maybe it's Evelyn, and maybe it's the cook; but any lady in a tower! The thought of it doth please me well."

CHAPTER X

A WRECKED CANNA BED

Raridan was at the station to meet Evelyn's guests, as he had promised. He had established a claim upon their notice on the occasion of one of his visits to Evelyn at college, and he greeted them with an air of possession which would have been intolerable in another man. He pressed Miss Warren for news of the Connecticut nutmeg crop, and hoped that Miss Marshall had not lost her accent in crossing the Missouri, while he begged their baggage checks and waved their minor impedimenta into the hands of the station porters.

Wise men, long ago, abandoned the hope of accounting for college friendships in either sex, and there was nothing proved in Evelyn's case by her choice of these young women as her intimate friends. Annie Warren was as reserved and quiet as Evelyn could be in her soberest moments; Belle Marshall was as frank and friendly as Evelyn became in her lightest moods. Evelyn had been the beauty of her class; her two friends were what is called, by people that wish to be kind, nice looking. Annie Warren had been the best scholar in her class; Belle Marshall had been among the poorest; and Evelyn had maintained a happy medium between the two. And so it fortunately happened that the trio mitigated one another's imperfections.

Evelyn had summoned her guests at this time principally to have their support through the carnival. They made light of the perplexities and difficulties of Evelyn's own participation when she unfolded them; there would be a lot of fun in it, they thought, and they deemed it, too, a recognition of Evelyn's fine qualities. They were fresh from college and they could see nothing in the carnival and the coronation of the carnival's queen that was inconsistent with a girl's dignity; it ranked at least with some of the festivals of girl's colleges. The whole matter presently resolved itself into the question of clothes, and Evelyn's coronation gown was laid before them and duly praised.

"It is worth while," declared Miss Marshall, "to have a chance to wear clothes like that just once in your life."

Evelyn had discussed with her father ways and means of entertaining her guests; he was anxious for her to celebrate her home-coming with a great deal of entertaining. He preferred large functions, perhaps for the reason that he could lose himself better in them than in small gatherings, in which his responsibilities as host could not be dodged. In a large company he could take one or two of his old friends into a corner and enjoy a smoke with them. He wished Evelyn to give a lawn party before the blight of fall came upon his flowers and shrubbery; but she persuaded him to wait until after the carnival. He still felt a little guilty about having asked Evelyn to appear in this public way, but she showed no resentment; she was honestly glad to do anything that would please him. The ball was near at hand and she proposed that they give a small dinner in the interval.

"I'll ask Warry and Mr. Saxton." People were already coupling Saxton's name with Raridan's.

"Oh, yes, that's all right."

"I don't want very many; I'd like to ask the Whipples;" she went on, with the anxious, far-away look that comes into the eyes of a woman who is weighing dinner guests or matching fabrics.

"Can't you ask Wheaton?" ventured Mr. Porter cautiously from behind his paper. Men grow humble in such matters from the long series of rejections to which they are subjected by the women of their households.

"If you say so," Evelyn assented. "He isn't exciting, but Belle Marshall can get on with anybody. I'm out of practice and won't try too many. Mrs. Whipple will help over the hard places."

Finally, however, her party numbered ten, but it seemed to Wheaton a large assemblage. He had never taken a lady in to dinner before, but he had studied a book of etiquette, and the chapter on "Dining Out" had given him a hint of what was expected. It had not, however, supplied him with a fund of talk, but he was glad to find, when he reached the table, that the company was so small that talk could be general, and he was thankful for the shelter made for him by the light banter which followed the settling of chairs. Saxton went in with Evelyn, who wished to make amends for his clumsy reception on the occasion of his first appearance in the house.

"I'm glad you could come to our board once without being snubbed by the maid," she said to John, when they were seated.

"I came under convoy of Mr. Raridan this time. I find that he is pretty hard to lose."

"Oh, he's a splendid guide! He declares that there are just as interesting things to see here in Clarkson as there are in Rome or Venice. He told Miss Warren this afternoon that it would take him a month to show her half the sights."

"He certainly makes things interesting. His local history is delightful."

"Yes; father tells him that he knows nearly everything, but that the pity is it isn't all true. You see, Warry and I have known each other always. The Raridans lived very near us, just over the way."

"He has shown me the place; it's on the clay sugar-loaf across the street."

"Isn't it shameful of him not to bring his ancestral home down to the street level?"

"Oh, he says he'd rather burn the money. It seems that he fought the assessment as long as he could and has refused to abide by it. He enjoys fighting it in the courts. It gives him something to do."

"That's like Warry. He can be more steadfast in error than anybody."

Raridan was exchanging chaff with Miss Marshall across the table and Wheaton was stranded for the moment.

"You must tell us about that Chinaman at your bachelors' house, Mr. Wheaton. Mr. Raridan has told me many funny stories about him, but I think he makes up most of them."

"I'd hardly dare repudiate any of Mr. Raridan's

stories; but I'll say that we couldn't get on without the Chinaman. He's a very faithful fellow."

"But Mr. Raridan says he isn't!" exclaimed Evelyn. "He says that you bachelors suffer terribly from his mistakes, and that he can't keep any rice for use at weddings because the Oriental takes it out of his pockets and makes puddings of it."

"That must be one of Mr. Raridan's jokes," said Wheaton. "We have had no rice pudding since I went to live at The Bachelors'." Wheaton was suspicious of Raridan's jokes. He was not always sure that he caught the point of them. He saw that Saxton, who sat opposite him, got on very well with Miss Porter, and he was surprised at this; he had thought Saxton very slow, and yet he seemed to be as much at his ease as Raridan, who was Wheaton's ideal master of social accomplishment. He was somewhat dismayed by the array of silver beside his plate, and he found himself covertly taking his cue from Saxton, who seemed to make his choice without difficulty. It dawned on him presently that the forks and spoons were arranged in order; that it was not necessary to exercise any judgment of selection, and he felt elated to see how easily it was managed. In his relief he engaged Miss Marshall in a talk about Richmond. He knew the names of banks and bankers there, from having looked them up in the bank directories in the course of business. He liked the Southern girl's vivacity, though he thought Evelyn much handsomer and more dignified. She asked him whether he played golf, which had just been introduced into Clarkson, and he was forced to admit that he did not; and he ventured to add that he had heard it called

an old man's game. When she replied that she shouldn't imagine then that it would interest him particularly, he felt foolish and could not think of anything to say in reply. Raridan again claimed Miss Marshall's attention, and Wheaton was drawn into talk with Evelyn and Saxton.

"Mr. Saxton has never seen one of our carnivals," she said, "and neither have I. You know I've missed them by being away so much."

"They expect to have a great entertainment this year," said Wheaton. He was sorry for the secrecy with which the names of the principal participants were guarded; he would have liked to say something to Miss Porter about it, but he did not dare, with Saxton listening. Moreover, he was not sure that she had consented to take part.

"I suppose it's a good deal like amateur theatricals, only on a larger scale," suggested Saxton.

"That's not taking the carnival in the right spirit," said Evelyn. "The word amateur is jarring, I think. We must try to imagine that King Midas really and truly comes floating down the Missouri River on a barge, supported by his men of magic, and that they are met by a delegation of the wise men of Clarkson, all properly clad, and escorted to the local parthenon, or whatever it is called, where the keys of the city are given to him. I'm sure it's all very plausible."

"But I don't see," said Saxton, "why all the Western towns that go in for these carnivals have to go back to mythology and medieval customs. Why don't they use something indigenous,—the Indians for instance?"

"They're too recent," Evelyn answered. "The people

around here—a good many of them, at least—were here before the savages had all gone. And those whose fathers and mothers were scalped might take it as unpleasantly suggestive if a lot of white men, dressed up as Indians, paraded themselves through the streets."

"What was that about Indians?" demanded Mr. Porter, who had been busy exchanging reminiscences with Mrs. Whipple. "Why, there hasn't been an Indian on the place for twenty years!"

"Oh yes, there has, father," said Evelyn. "It was only five years ago that there were two in this room. Don't you remember, when Warry had his hobby for educating Indian youth? He brought those boys up here for Christmas dinner."

"I remember; and they didn't like turkey," added Mr. Porter. "They were hungry for their native bear meat."

"It's too bad," said Raridan sorrowfully, "that a man never can live down his good deeds."

Raridan liked to pretend that Clarkson society had a deep philosophy which he alone understood. He had fallen into his favorite rôle as a social sage for the benefit of the strangers, and Mrs. Whipple was correcting or denying what he said. He had assured the table that the supreme social test was whether people could walk on their own hardwood floors and rugs without taking the long slide into eternity. Philistines could buy hardwood floors, but only the elect could walk on them.

"Society in Clarkson is easily classified," said Raridan readily, as though he had often given thought to this subject. "There are three classes of homes in this town,

namely, those in which no servants are kept, those in which two are kept, and those in which the maids wear caps."

"Warry is going from bad to worse," declared Mrs. Whipple. "I'm sure he could give in advance the menu of any dinner he's asked to."

"A tax on the memory and not on the imagination," retorted Warry.

Miss Warren was asking Mr. Porter's opinion of local political conditions which were just then attracting widespread attention. Mr. Porter was expressing his distrust of a leader who had leaped into fame by a violent arraignment of the rich.

"It wouldn't be so terribly hard for us all to get rich," said Warry. "I sometimes marvel at the squalor about us. All that a man need do is to concentrate his attention on one thing, and if he is capable of earning a dollar a day he can just as easily earn ten thousand a year. Why"—he continued earnestly, "I knew a fellow in Peoria, who devised a scheme for building duplicates of some of the architectural wonders of the Old World in American cities. His plan was to send out a million postal cards inviting a dollar apiece from a million people. Almost anybody can give away a dollar and not miss it."

"How did the scheme work?" asked Mr. Porter.

"It wasn't tested," answered Warry. "The doctors in the sanitarium wouldn't let him out long enough to mail his postal cards."

General Whipple persuaded Miss Marshall to tell a negro story, which she did delightfully, while the table listened. Southerners are, after all, the most natural

talkers we have and the only ones who can talk freely of themselves without offense. Her speech was musical, and she told her story with a nice sense of its dramatic quality. At the climax, after the laughter had abated, she asked, with an air of surprise at their pleasure in her tale:

"Didn't you all ever hear that story before?" She was guiltless of final r's, and her drawl was delicious.

"Oh, Miss Marshall! I *knew* you'd say it!" Raridan appealed to the others to be sure of witnesses.

"What are you all laughing at?" demanded the girl, flushing and smiling about her.

"Oh, you did it twice!"

"I *didn't* say it, Mr. Raridan," she said, with dignity. "I never said that after I went North to school."

"Well, Belle," said Evelyn, "I'm heartily ashamed of you. After all we did in college to break you of it, you are at it again though you've been only a few months away from us."

"It's hopeless, I'm afraid," said Miss Warren. "You know, Evelyn, she said 'I-alls' when she first came to college."

They had their coffee on the veranda, where the lights from within made a pleasant dusk about them. Porter's heart was warm with the joy of Evelyn's home-coming. She had been away from him so much that he was realizing for the first time the common experience of fathers, who find that their daughters have escaped suddenly and inexplicably from girlhood into womanhood; and yet the girl heart in her had not lost its freshness nor its thirst for pleasure. She had carried off her little com-

pany charmingly; Porter had enjoyed it himself, and he felt young again in the presence of youth.

General Whipple had attached himself to one of the couples of young people that were strolling here and there in the grounds. Porter and Mrs. Whipple held the veranda alone; both were unconsciously watching Evelyn and Saxton as they walked back and forth in front of the house, talking gaily; and Porter smiled at the eagerness and quickness of her movements. Saxton's deliberateness contrasted oddly with the girl's light step. Such a girl must marry a man worthy of her; there could be no question of that; and for the first time the thought of losing her rose in his heart and numbed it.

Porter's cigar had gone out, a fact to which Mrs. Whipple called his attention.

"I've heard that it's a great compliment for a man to let his cigar go out when he's talking to a woman. But I don't believe my chatter was responsible for it this time." She nodded toward Evelyn, as if she understood what had been in his thought.

"She's very fine. Both handsome and sensible, and at our age we know how rare the combination is."

"I shall have to trust you to keep an eye on her. I want her to know the right people." He spoke between the flashes of the cigar he was relighting.

"Don't worry about her. You may trust her around the world. Evelyn has already manifested an interest in my advice," she added, smiling to herself in the dark,—"and she didn't seem much pleased with it!"

Evelyn and Saxton had met the others, who were coming up from the walks, and there was a redistribution at

the house; it was too beautiful to go in, they said, and the strolling abroad continued. A great flood of moonlight poured over the grounds. A breeze stole up from the valley and made a soothing rustle in the trees. Evelyn rescued Wheaton and Miss Warren from each other; she sent Raridan away to impart, as he said, further western lore to the Yankee. She followed, with Wheaton, the arc which the others were transcribing. A feeling of elation possessed him. The tide of good fortune was bearing him far, but memory played hide and seek with him as he walked there talking to Evelyn Porter; he was struck with the unreality of this new experience. He was afraid of blundering; of failing to meet even the trifling demands of her careless talk. He remembered once, in his train-boy days, having pressed upon a pretty girl one of Miss Braddon's novels; and the girl's scornful rejection of the book and of himself came back and mocked him. Raridan's merry laugh rang out suddenly far across the lawn; he had done more with his life than Raridan would ever do with his; Raridan was a foolish fellow. Saxton passed them with Miss Marshall; Saxton was dull; he had failed in the cattle business. James Wheaton was not a town's jester, and he was not a failure. Evelyn was telling him some of Belle Marshall's pranks at school.

"She was the greatest cut-up. I suppose she'll never change. I don't believe we do change so much as the wiseacres pretend, do you?"

She was aware that she had talked a great deal and threw out this line to him a little desperately; he was proving even more difficult than she had imagined him.

He had been thinking of his mother—forgotten these many years—who was old even when he left home. He remembered her only as the dominant figure of the steaming kitchen where she had ministered with rough kindness and severity to her uncouth brood. His sisters—what loutish, brawling girls they were, and how they fought over whatever silly finery they were able to procure for themselves! A faint flower-scent rose from the soft skirts of the tall young woman beside him. He hated himself for his memories.

He felt suddenly alarmed by her question, which seemed to aim at the undercurrent of his own silent thought.

"There are those of us who ought to change," he said.

The others had straggled back toward the veranda and were disappearing indoors.

"They seem to be going in. We can find our way through the sun-porch; I suppose it might be called a moon-porch, too," she said, leading the way.

They heard the sound of the piano through the open windows, and a girl's voice broke gaily into song.

"It's Belle. She does sing those coon songs wonderfully. Let us wait here until she finishes this one." The sun-porch opened from the dining-room. They could see beyond it, into the drawing-room; the singer was in plain view, sitting at the piano; Raridan stood facing her, keeping time with an imaginary baton.

A man came unobserved to the glass door of the porch and stood unsteadily peering in. He was very dirty and balanced himself in that abandon with which intoxicated men belie Newton's discovery. He had gained the

top step with difficulty; the light from the window blinded him and for a moment he stood within the inclosure blinking. An ugly grin spread over his face as he made out the two figures by the window, and he began a laborious journey toward them. He tried to tiptoe, and this added further to his embarrassments; but the figures by the window were intent on the song and did not hear him. He drew slowly nearer; one more step and he would have concluded his journey. He poised on his toes before taking it, but the law of gravitation now asserted itself. He lunged forward heavily, casting himself upon Wheaton, and nearly knocking him from his feet.

"Jimmy," he blurted in a drunken voice. "Jim-my!"

Evelyn turned quickly and shrank back with a cry. Wheaton was slowly rallying from the shock of his surprise. He grabbed the man by the arms and began pushing him toward the door.

"Don't be alarmed," he said over his shoulder to Evelyn, who had shrunk back against the wall. "I'll manage him."

This, however, was not so easily done. The tramp, as Evelyn supposed him to be, had been sobered by Wheaton's attack. He clasped his fingers about Wheaton's throat and planted his feet firmly. He clearly intended to stand his ground, and he dug his fingers into Wheaton's neck with the intention of hurting.

"Father!" cried Evelyn once, but the song was growing noisier toward its end and the circle about the piano did not hear. She was about to call again when a heavy step sounded outside on the walk and Bishop Delafield came swiftly into the porch. He had entered the

grounds from the rear and was walking around the house to the front door.

"Quick! that man there,—I'll call the others!" cried Evelyn, still shrinking against the wall. Wheaton had been forced to his knees and his assailant was choking him. But there was no need of other help. The bishop had already seized the tramp about the body with his great hands, tearing him from Wheaton's neck. He strode, with the squirming figure in his grasp, toward an open window at the back of the glass inclosure, and pushed the man out. There was a great snorting and threshing below. The hill dipped abruptly away from this side of the house and the man had fallen several feet, into a flower bed.

"Get away from here," the bishop said, in his deep voice, "and be quick about it." The man rose and ran swiftly down the slope toward the street.

The bishop walked back to the window. The others had now hurried out in response to Evelyn's peremptory calls, and she was telling of the tramp's visit, while Wheaton received their condolences, and readjusted his tie. His collar and shirt-front showed signs of contact with dirt.

"It was a tramp," said Evelyn, as the others plied her with questions, "and he attacked Mr. Wheaton."

"Where's he gone?" demanded Porter, excitedly.

"There he goes," said the bishop, pointing toward the window. "He smelled horribly of whisky, and I dropped him gently out of the window. The shock seems to have inspired his legs."

"I'll have the police—," began Porter.

"Oh, he's gone now, Mr. Porter," said Wheaton coolly, as he restored his tie. "Bishop Delafield disposed of him so vigorously that he'll hardly come back."

"Yes, let him go," said the bishop, wiping his hands on his handkerchief. "I'm only afraid, Porter, that I've spoiled your best canna bed."

CHAPTER XI

THE KNIGHTS OF MIDAS BALL

There were two separate and distinct sides to the annual carnival of the Knights of Midas. The main object to which the many committees on arrangements addressed themselves was the assembling in Clarkson of as many people as could be collected by assiduous advertising and the granting of special privileges by the railroads. The streets must be filled, and to fill them and keep them filled it was necessary to entertain the masses; and this was done by providing what the committee on publicity and promotion proclaimed to be a monster Pageant of Industry. The spectacle was not tawdry nor ugly. It did not lack touches of real beauty. The gaily decked floats, borne over the street car tracks by trolleys, were like barges from a pageant of the Old World in the long ago, impelled by mysterious forces. From many floats fireworks summoned the heavens to behold the splendor and bravery of the parade. The procession was led by the Knights of Midas, arrayed in yellow robes and wearing helmets which shone with all the effulgence of bright tin. There was a series of floats on which Commerce, Agriculture, Transportation and Manufacturing were embodied and deified in the persons of sundry young women, posed in appropriate attitudes and lifted high on uncertain pedestals for the admiration of

the multitude. On other cars men followed strenuously their callings; coopers hammered hoops upon their barrels; a blacksmith, with an infant forge at his command, made the sparks fly from his anvil as his float rumbled by. An enormous steer was held in check by ropes, and surrounded by murderous giants from the abattoirs; Gambrinus smiled down from a proud height of kegs on men that bottled beer below. Many brass bands, including a famous cowboy band from Lone Prairie, and an Indian boy band from a Wyoming reservation, played the newest and most dashing marches of the day. Thus were the thrift, the enterprise, the audacity, and the generosity of the people of Clarkson exemplified.

Such was the first night's entertainment. The crowd which was brought to town to spend its money certainly was not defrauded. The second night it was treated to band concerts, a horse-show and other entertainments, while the Knights of Midas closed the door of their wooden temple upon all but their chosen guests. These were, of course, expected to pay a certain sum for their tickets, and the sum was not small. The Knights of Midas ball was not, it should be said, a cheap affair. Raridan and Saxton had taken a balcony box for the ball and they asked Evelyn's guests to share it with them. Raridan still growled to Saxton over what he called Evelyn's debasement, but he had said nothing more to Evelyn about it.

"Here's to the deification of Jim Wheaton," he sighed, as he and Saxton waited for the young ladies in the Porter drawing-room.

Saxton grinned at him unsympathetically.

"Stop sighing like an air-brake. You will be dancing yourself to death in an hour."

When the two young women came in, Raridan's spirits brightened. Evelyn was, Miss Marshall declared, "perfectly adorable" in her gown; but the young men did not see her. She was to go later with her father.

They were early at the hall, whose bareness had been relieved by a gay show of bunting and flags.

"I will now give you a succinct running account of the first families of this community as they assemble," Raridan announced, when they had settled in their chairs. There were no seats on the main floor, as the ceremonial part of the entertainment was brief, and the greater number of the spectators stood until it was over. An aisle was kept down the middle of the hall and on each side the crowd gossiped, while a band high above played popular airs.

"We're all here," said Raridan, when the band rested. "The butcher, the baker and the candlestick-maker; also probably some of our cooks. We are the spectators at one of Nero's matinees; the goodly knights are ready for combat, and those who have had practice in the adjacent packing houses have the best chance of winning the victory. There comes Tim Margrave, one of the merriest of them all, full of Arthurian valor and as gentle a knight as ever held lance or bought a city council. And there is the master of our largest and goriest abattoir. That is not a star on his chest, but a diamond pig, rampant on a field of dress-shirt. He used to wear it on his watch-chain, but it was too inconspicuous there —

> 'On his breast a five-point star
> Points the way that his kingdoms are.'"

Miss Marshall was scrutinizing the man indicated through her opera glasses.

"Why, it *is* a pig!" she declared.

"Of course it is," said Warry, with an aggrieved air. "I hope you don't think I'd fib about it. Now, the girl over there by the window, with the young man with the pompadour hair, is Mabel Margrave, whose father you saw a minute ago. She is looking this way with her lorgnette; but don't flinch; there's only the plain window glass of our rude western commerce in it; she handles it awfully well, though."

"And the man coming in who looks like a statesman?" asked Miss Marshall.

"That's Wilkins, the boy orator of the Range. He palpitates with Ciceronian speech. He's our greatest authority on the demonetization of wampum. The young man who's talking to him is telling him what hot stuff he is, and that the speech he made at Tin Cup, Texas, last week on the 'Inequalities of Taxation' is the warmest little speech that has been made in this country since Patrick Henry died. He's a good thing,—Wilkins. The Indians back on the reservation, where he goes to raise the wolf's mournful howl when white people won't listen to him, call him Young-man-not-afraid-of-his-voice. Our Chinaman calls him Yung Lung. Quite a character, Wilkins."

"And," Miss Warren inquired, "the grave, handsome man, who must be an eminent jurist?"

"He does one's laundry," Raridan replied, "and," looking at his cuffs critically, "he does it rather decently."

"There's another side to this," said Saxton to Miss

Warren, while Raridan babbled on to the pretty Virginian. "These people have had a terribly hard time of it. They've been through a panic that would have killed an ordinary community; a good many of the nicest of them have had to begin over again; and it's uphill work. It isn't so funny when we consider that these older people have tried their level best to make the wilderness blossom as the rose, and after they'd made a fine beginning the desert repossessed it. There's something splendid in their courage."

"Yes, it's hard for us who live on the outside to appreciate it. And they seem such nice people, too."

"Don't they! They're big-hearted and plucky and generous! Eastern people don't begin to appreciate the people who do their rough work for them."

The other boxes and the gallery had filled, and the main floor was crowded, save where the broad aisle had been maintained down the center from the front door to the stage. A buzz of talk floated over the hall. The band was silent while its leader peered down upon the floor waiting his signal. He turned suddenly and the trumpets broke forth into the notes of a dignified march. All eyes turned to the front of the hall, where the knights, in their robes, preceded by the grand seneschal, bearing his staff of office, were emerging slowly from the outer door into the aisle. When the stage was reached, the procession formed in long lines, facing inward on the steps, making a path through which the governors, who were distinguished by scarlet robes, came attending the person of the king.

"All hail the king!" A crowd of knights in evening

dress, who were honorary members of the organization and had no parts in costume, sent up the shout.

"Hail to Midas!"

"Isn't he noble and grand?" shouted Raridan in Miss Marshall's ear. A murmur ran through the hall as Wheaton was recognized; his name was passed to those who did not know him, and everybody applauded. He was really imposing in the robes of his kingship. He walked with a fitting deliberation among his escort. He was conscious of the lights, the applause, the music, and of the fact that he was the center of it all. The cheers were subsiding as the party neared the throne.

"I'll wager he's badly frightened," said Raridan to Saxton.

"Don't you think it," declared Saxton, "he looks as cool as a cucumber."

"Oh, he's cool enough," grumbled Raridan.

"You see what envy will do for a man," remarked Saxton to Miss Marshall. "Mr. Raridan's simply perishing because he isn't there himself. But what's this?"

The king had reached his throne and faced the audience. All the knights bowed low; the king returned the salutation while the audience cheered.

"It's like a comic opera," said Miss Marshall.

The supreme knight advanced and handed Wheaton the scepter and there was renewed applause and cheering.

"Only funnier," said Raridan. "Yell, Saxton, yell!" He rose to his feet and led his end of the house in cheering. "It makes me think of old times at football," he declared, sinking back into his chair with an air of exhaustion, and wiping his face.

The king had seated himself, and expectancy again possessed the hall. The band struck up another air, and a line of girls in filmy, trailing gowns was filing in.

"There are the foolish virgins who didn't fill their lamps," said Raridan; "that's why they have brought bouquets."

"But they ought to have got their gowns at the same place," said Miss Marshall, who was abetting Raridan in his comments. Miss Warren and Saxton, on the other side of her, were taking it all more seriously.

"It's really very pretty and impressive," Miss Warren declared, "and not at all silly as I feared it might be."

"Well, *that* is very pretty," replied Saxton.

The queen, following her ladies in waiting, had appeared at the door. There was a pause, a murmur, and then a great burst of applause as those who were in the secret identified the queen, and those who were not learned it as Evelyn's name passed from lip to lip. Whatever there was of absurdity in the scene was dispelled by Evelyn's loveliness and dignity. Her white gown intensified her fairness, and her long court train added an illusion of height. She carried her head high, with a serene air that was habitual. The charm that set her apart from other girls was in no wise lost in the mock splendor of this ceremony.

"She's as lovely as a bride," murmured Belle Marshall, so low that only Raridan heard her. Something caught in his throat and he looked steadily down upon the approaching queen and said nothing. The supreme knight descended to escort the queen to the dais. The king came down to meet her and led her to a place beside him, where they turned and faced the applauding crowd.

The grand chamberlain now stepped forward and read the proclamation of the Knights of Midas, announcing that the king had reached their city, and urging upon all subjects the duty of showing strict obedience. He read a formula to which Evelyn and Wheaton made responses. A page stood beside the queen holding a crown, which glittered with false brilliants upon a richly embroidered pillow, and when the king knelt before her, she placed it upon his head. At this there was more cheering and handclapping. Saxton glanced toward Raridan as he beat his own hands together, expecting one of Raridan's gibes at the chamberlain's bombast; but there was a fierce light in Raridan's eyes that Saxton had never seen there before. He was staring before him at Evelyn Porter, as she now sat beside Wheaton on the tawdry throne; his face was white and his lips were set. Saxton was struck with sorrow for him.

There was a stir throughout the hall. The king and queen were descending; the floor manager was already manifesting his authority.

"Let's stay here until the grand march is over," said Raridan. He had partly regained his spirits, and was again pointing out people of interest on the floor below.

"Now wasn't it magnificent?" he demanded.

"Wasn't Evelyn lovely?" exclaimed the girls in a breath.

"We didn't need this circus to prove it, did we?" asked Raridan cynically.

"Aren't there any more exercises—is it all over?" cried Miss Marshall.

"Bless us, no!" replied Raridan.

The evolutions of the grand march were now in progress and they stood watching it.

"They didn't get enough rehearsals for this," said Raridan. "Look at that mix up!" One of the knights had tripped and stumbled over the skirt of his robe. "They ought to behead him for that."

"Mr. Raridan's terribly severe," said Saxton. The king and queen, leading the march, were passing under the box.

"The king really looks scared," remarked Miss Warren.

"Yes; he's rather conscious of his clothes," said Raridan. "His train rattles him." Evelyn glanced up at them and laughed and nodded.

Before the march broke up into dancing they went down from the gallery. On the floor, the older people were resolving themselves into lay figures against the wall. They found Mr. Porter leaning against one of the rude supports of the gallery, wondering whether he might now escape to the retirement of the cloak-room to get his hat and cigar. The young people burst upon him with congratulations.

"You must be dying of pride," exclaimed Miss Marshall.

"Evelyn never looked better," declared Miss Warren. "It was splendid!"

"We are proud to know you, sir," said Raridan, shaking hands.

"I surely came to Clarkson in the right year," said Saxton.

Porter regarded them with the patronizing smile which he kept for those who praised Evelyn to his face.

"The only thing now," he said, "is to get that girl home before daylight."

"Oh, the queen gives her own orders," said Raridan. "You'll never be boss at the Hill any more!" He was bringing up all the unattached men he knew to present them to the visitors. He never forgot any one, and not merely the débutantes of other years, but girls that were voted slow in the brutal court of social opinion, were always sure of rescue at his hands. Evelyn and Wheaton were bearing down upon them; Evelyn, flushed and happy, and Wheaton in a glow from the exercise of the march and a dance with her. There was a fusillade of interjections as many crowded about with praise of the leading actors. It was all breathless and incoherent. The crowd was uncomfortably large, and the hall was hot. Porter found General Whipple and escaped with him to the smoking room. Young men were everywhere writing their names on elaborate dance cards.

"Save a few for us," Raridan pleaded airily as the men he had introduced hovered about Evelyn's guests. He made no effort to speak to Evelyn, who was besieged by a throng that wished to congratulate her or to dance with her. She gave Saxton her fingers through a rift in the crowd and he turned again to find himself deserted. Raridan was dancing with Belle Marshall and Annie Warren nodded to him over the shoulder of a youth who had waltzed her away. While Saxton waited for the quadrilles to which his dancing limitations restricted him, he made a circuit of the room. Mrs. Whipple was holding forth to a group of dowagers but turned from them to him.

"I'm hardly sure of you without Warry, and this is

the first time I've seen you alone. Of course, you were looking for me!"

"That's what I came for."

"Please say something more like that. I saw you come in, young man; they are very nice girls, too."

She was trying to remember who had told her that Saxton was stupid.

"How did you like it? This was your first, I think."

"Beautiful! charming! An enchanting entertainment!"

"Is that for you and Warry, too? He always has to approve everything here."

"Oh, I can't speak for him," John answered; "we don't necessarily always agree."

"I'll have to find out later, from him. You and Warry appear to be fast friends, and he talks a great deal. What has he told you about me?"

"He said you were kind to strange young men; but that wasn't information."

"You'll do, I think. Here comes Warry now."

Raridan came along looking for a country girl whose brother he knew, and with whom he had engaged the dance which was now in progress.

"I think she's hiding from me," he complained to Mrs. Whipple, "but the gods are kind; I can talk to you. The general is a generous man." He regarded critically a great bunch of red roses which she held in her lap. "That's why the florist didn't have any for me."

"Oh, these are Evelyn's," explained Mrs. Whipple. "She asked me to keep them for her—the king's gift, you know. I feel highly honored."

"By the king? Impossible! I'll give you something nice to let me drop them into the alley."

"Is it as bad as that? Well, good luck to you!"

He stood with his hands in his pockets looking musingly out over the heads of the dancers. Mrs. Whipple eyed him attentively.

"You know you always tell me all of them," she persisted; but he was following a fair head and a pair of graceful shoulders and ever and anon a laughing face that flashed into sight and then out of range. His rural friend's sister loomed before him, in an attitude of dejection against the wall, and he hastened to her with contrition, and made paradise fly under her feet.

Saxton was doing his best with the square dances, and had finished a quadrille with Evelyn, who had thereafter asked him to sit out a round dance with her; still Raridan did not come near them. He was busy with Evelyn's guests or immolating himself for the benefit of the country wallflowers. Supper was served at midnight in an annex of the hall.

"Here's where we forget to be polite," Raridan announced. "If we die in the struggle I hope you fair young charges will treasure our memories."

The king and queen and the high powers of the knights enjoyed the distinction of sitting at a table where they were served by waiters, while the multitude fought for their food.

"If you lose our seats while we're gone," Raridan warned Miss Marshall and Miss Warren, "you shall have only six olives apiece." He led Saxton in a descent upon an array of long tables at which men were harpooning sandwiches and dipping salad. The successful

raiders were rewarded by the waiters with cups of coffee to add to their perils as they bore their plates away. There was a great clatter and buzz in the room. On the platform where the distinguished personages of the carnival sat there was now much laughing.

"Margrave's pretty noisy to-night," observed Raridan, biting into his sandwich, and sweeping the platform with a comprehensive glance.

"You mustn't forget that this is a carnival," replied Saxton. He had followed his friend's eyes and knew that it was not the horse-laugh of Margrave that troubled him, but the vista which disclosed both Wheaton and Evelyn Porter.

"Mr. Raridan's really not so funny as Evelyn said he was," remarked Belle Marshall.

"The truth is," Raridan answered, rallying, "that I'm getting old. Miss Porter remembers only my light-hearted youth."

"Well, let's revive our youth in another food rush," suggested Saxton. They repeated their tactics of a few minutes before, returning with ice-cream, which the waiters were cutting from bricks for supplicants who stood before them in Oliver Twist's favorite attitude.

"Mr. Saxton's a terrible tenderfoot," lamented Raridan, when they returned from the charge. "He was giving your ice-cream, Miss Warren, to an old gentleman, who stood horror-struck in the midst of the carnage."

"You'd think we rehearsed our talk," Saxton objected. "He wants me to tell you that he got the poor old gentleman not only food for all his relations, but took away other people's chairs for him, as well."

"Lying isn't a lost art, after all," said Raridan.

As they returned to the hall they met a crowd of the nobility who were descending from their high seats.

"So sorry to have deserted you all evening," said Evelyn to her girl friends as they came together in a crush at the door; "but the worst is over." She looked up curiously at Raridan, who seemed purposely to have turned away to talk to Captain Wheelock, and was commenting ironically on the management that made such a mob possible. There was only a moment for any interchange, but she was sure now that Raridan was avoiding her and it touched her pride.

"I hope you won't forget our dance, Mr. Saxton," she said, struggling to follow a young man who had come to claim her. Raridan turned again, but hung protectingly over Miss Marshall, whom the noisy Margrave seemed bent on crushing. Raridan had not asked Evelyn to dance, though she had been importuned by every other man she knew, and by a great many others whom she did not know. As the gay music of a waltz carried her down the hall with a proud youngster who had been waiting for her, the lightness of her heart was gone for the moment. She remembered Raridan's curious mood on the night before her friends came, and his unfriendliness to the idea of her taking part in the carnival. She was piqued that he had studiously avoided her to-night. The others must have noticed it. Warry needed discipline; he had been spoilt and she meant to visit punishment upon him. She did not care, she told herself, whether Warry Raridan liked what she did or not.

But something of the glory of the evening had de-

parted. She was really growing tired, and several of the youths who came for dances were told that they must sit them out, and she welcomed their chatter, throwing in her yes and no occasionally merely to impel them on. Wheaton had grown a little afraid of her after the glow of his royal honors had begun to fade. It is often so with players in amateur theatricals, who think they are growing wonderfully well acquainted during rehearsals; but after the performance is concluded, they are surprised to find how easily they slip back to the old footing of casual acquaintance. There was a flutter about Evelyn at the last, when her father made bold to ask her when she would be ready to go.

"The girls have already gone," he said, replying to her question. When they were in the carriage together and were rolling homeward, she gave a sigh of relief.

"Are you glad it's over?" asked her father.

"Yes, I believe I am."

"Well, they all said fine things about you, girl. I guess I've got to be proud of you." This was his way of saying that he was both proud and grateful.

As they reached the entrance to the Hill they passed another carriage just leaving the grounds. Saxton put his head out of the window and called a cheery good night, and Evelyn waved a hand to him.

"It was Warry and Saxton," said Mr. Porter. "I thought they'd stop to talk it over."

Evelyn had thought so too, but she did not say so.

CHAPTER XII

A MORNING AT ST. PAUL'S

Wheaton ran away from the livelier spirits of the Knights of Midas, who urged him to join in a celebration at the club after the ball broke up. He pleaded the necessity of early rising and went home and to bed, where, however, he slept little, but lay dreaming over the incidents of the night, particularly those in which he had figured. Many people had congratulated him, and while there was an irony in much of this, as if the whole proceeding were a joke, he had taken it all in the spirit in which it had been offered. He felt a trifle anxious as to his reception at the breakfast table as he dressed, but his mirror gave him confidence. The night had been an important one for him, and he could afford to bear with his fellows, who would, he knew, spare him no more than they spared any one else in their chaff.

They flaunted at him the morning papers with portraits of the king and queen of the ball bracketed together in double column. He took the papers from them as he replied to their ironies, and casually inspected them while the Chinaman brought in his breakfast.

"Didn't expect to see you this morning," said Caldwell, the Transcontinental agent, stirring his coffee and

winking at Brown, the smelter manager. "You society men are usually shy at breakfast."

Wheaton put down his paper carelessly, and spread his napkin.

"Oh, a king has to eat," said Brown.

"Well," said Wheaton, with an air of relief, "it's worth something to be alive the morning after."

But they had no sympathy for him.

"Listen to him," said Caldwell derisively, "just as if he didn't wish he could do it all over again to-night."

"Not for a million dollars," declared Wheaton, shaking his head dolefully.

"Yes," said Captain Wheelock, "I suppose that show last night bored you nearly to death."

"I'm always glad to see these fellows sacrifice themselves for the public good," said Brown. "Wheaton's a martyr now, with a nice pink halo."

"Well, it doesn't go here," said the army officer severely. "We've got to take him down a peg if he gets too gay."

"Why, we've already got one sassiety man in the house," said Caldwell, "and that's hard enough to bear." He referred to Raridan, who was breakfasting in his room.

They were addressing one another, rather than Wheaton, whose presence they affected to ignore.

"I suppose there'll be no holding him now," said Caldwell. "It's like the taste for strong drink, this society business. They never get over it. It's ruined Raridan; he'd be a good fellow if it wasn't for that."

"Humph! you fellows are envious," said Wheaton, with an effort at swagger.

"Oh, I don't know!" said Brown, with rising inflection. "I suppose any of us could do it if we'd put up the money."

"Well," said Wheaton, "if they let you off as cheaply as they did me, you may call it a bargain."

"Oh, he jewed 'em down," persisted Caldwell, explaining to the others, "and he has the cheek to boast of it. I'll see that Margrave hears that."

"Yes, you do that," Wheaton retorted. "Everybody knows that Margrave's an easy mark." This counted as a palpable hit with Brown and Wheelock. Margrave was notorious for his hard bargains. Wheaton gathered up his papers and went out.

"He takes it pretty well," said Caldwell as they heard the door close after Wheaton. "He ought to make a pretty good fellow in time if he doesn't get stuck on himself."

"Well, I guess Billy Porter'll take him down if he gets too gay," exclaimed Brown.

"Porter may leave it to his daughter to do that," said Caldwell, shaking out the match with which he had lighted his cigar, and dropping it into his coffee cup.

"It'll never come to that," returned Brown.

"You never can tell. People were looking wise about it last night," said Captain Wheelock, who was a purveyor of gossip.

"Don't trouble yourself," volunteered Caldwell, who read the society items thoroughly every morning and created a social fabric out of them. "I guess Warry will have something to say to that."

At the bank Wheaton found that the men who came

in to transact business had a knowing nod for him, that implied a common knowledge of matters which it was not necessary to discuss. A good many who came to his desk asked him if he was tired. They referred to the carnival ball as a "push" and said it was "great" with all the emphasis that slang has imparted to these words.

Porter came down early and enveloped himself in a cloud of smoke. This in the bank was the outward and visible sign of a "grouch." When he pressed the button to call one of the messengers, he pushed it long and hard, so that the boys remarked to one another that the boss had been out late last night and wasn't feeling good.

Porter did not mention the ball to Wheaton in any way, except when he threw over to him a memorandum of the bank's subscription to the fund, remarking: "Send them a check. That's all of that for one year."

Wheaton made no reply, but did as Porter bade him. It was his business to accommodate himself to the president's moods, and he was very successful in doing so. A few of the bank's customers made use of him as a kind of human barometer, telephoning sometimes to ask how the old man was feeling, and whether it was a good time to approach him. He attributed the president's reticence this morning to late hours, and was very careful to answer promptly when Porter spoke to him. He knew that there would be no recognition by Porter of the fact that he had participated in a public function the night before; he would have to gather the glory of it elsewhere. He thought of Evelyn in moments when his work was not pressing, and won-

dered whether he could safely ask her father how she stood the night's gaiety. It occurred to him to pay his compliments by telephone; Raridan was always telephoning to girls; but he could not quite put himself in Raridan's place. Warry presumed a good deal, and was younger; he did many things which Wheaton considered undignified, though he envied the younger man's ease in carrying them off.

One of Porter's callers asked how Miss Porter had "stood the racket," as he phrased it.

"Don't ask me," growled Porter. "Didn't show up for breakfast."

William Porter did not often eat salad at midnight, but when he did it punished him.

As Wheaton was opening the afternoon mail he was called to the telephone-box to speak to Mrs. Jordan, a lady whom he had met at the ball. She was inviting a few friends for dinner the next evening to meet some guests who were with her for the carnival. She begged that Mr. Wheaton would pardon the informality of the invitation and come. He answered that he should be very glad to come; but when he got back to his desk he realized that he had probably made a mistake; the Jordans were socially anomalous, and there was nothing to be gained by cultivating them. However, he consoled himself with the recollection of one of Raridan's social dicta—that a dinner invitation should never be declined unless smallpox existed in the house of the hostess. He swayed between the disposition to consider the Jordans patronizingly and an honest feeling of gratitude for their invitation, as he bent over his desk signing drafts.

He found the Jordans very cordial. He was their star, and they made much of him; he was pleased that they showed him a real deference; when he spoke at the table, the others paused to listen. He knew the other young men slightly; one was a clerk in a railway office, and the other was the assistant manager of the city's largest dry goods house. The guests were young women from Mrs. Jordan's old home, in Piqua, Ohio. (Mrs. Jordan always gave the name of the state.) Wheaton realized that these young women were much easier to get on with than Miss Porter and other young women he had known latterly; they were more pointedly interested in pleasing him.

After a few days the carnival seemed to be forgotten; Wheaton's fellows at The Bachelors' stopped joking him about it. Raridan had never referred to it at all. On Sunday the newspapers printed a résumé of the social features of the carnival, and Wheaton read the familiar story, and all the other social news in the paper, in bed. He noticed with a twinge an item stating that Mrs. J. Elihu Jordan had entertained at dinner on Thursday evening for the Misses Sweetser, of Piqua, but was relieved to find that neither paper printed the names of the guests. The bachelors were very lazy on Sunday morning, excepting Raridan, who attended what he called "early church." This practice his fellow-lodgers accepted in silence as one of his vagaries. That a man should go to church at seven o'clock and then again at eleven, signified mere eccentricity to Raridan's fellow-boarders, who were not instructed in catholic practices, but divided their own Sunday morn-

ings much more rationally between the barber shop, the post-office and their places of business.

It was a bright morning; the week just ended had been, in a sense, epochal, and Wheaton resolved to go to church. It had been his habit to attend services occasionally, on Sunday evenings, at the People's Church, whose minister frequently found occasion to preach on topics of the day or on literary subjects. Doctor Morningstar was the most popular preacher in Clarkson; the People's Church was filled at all services; on Sunday evenings it was crowded. Doctor Morningstar's series of lectures on the Italian Renaissance, illustrated by the stereopticon, and his even more popular course of lectures on the Victorian novelists, had appealed to Wheaton and to many; but the People's Church was not fashionable; he decided to go this morning to St. Paul's, the Episcopal Cathedral. It was the oldest church in town, and many of the first families attended there. All fashionable weddings in Clarkson were held in the cathedral, not because it was popularly supposed to confer a spiritual benefit upon those who were blessed from its altar, but for the more excellent reason that the main aisle of this Gothic edifice gave ample space for the free sweep of bridal trains, and the chancel lent itself charmingly to the decorative purposes of the florist.

Wheaton found Raridan breakfasting alone, the others of the mess not having appeared. Raridan's good morning was not very cordial; he had worn a gloomy air for several days. Whenever Raridan seemed out of sorts, Caldwell always declared solemnly that Warry had been writing poetry.

"Going to church as usual?" Wheaton asked amiably.

Every Sunday morning some one asked Raridan this question; he supposed Wheaton was attempting to be facetious.

"Yes," he answered patiently; and added, as usual, "better go along."

"Don't care if I do," Wheaton replied, carelessly.

Raridan eyed him in surprise.

"Oh! glad to have you."

They walked toward the cathedral together, Wheaton satisfied that his own hat was as shiny and his frock coat as proper as Raridan's; their gloves were almost of the same shade. There was a stir in the vestibule of the cathedral, which many people in their Sunday finery were entering. Wheaton had never been in an Episcopal church before; it all seemed very strange to him—the rambling music of the voluntary, the unfamiliar scenes depicted on the stained glass windows; the soft light through which he saw well-dressed people coming to their places, and the scent of flowers and the faint breath of orris from the skirts of women. The boy choir came in singing a stirring processional that was both challenge and inspiration. It was like witnessing a little drama: the procession, the singing, the flutter of surplices as the choir found their stalls in the dim chancel. Raridan bowed when the processional cross passed him. Wheaton observed that no one else did so.

A young clergyman began reading the service, and Wheaton followed it in the prayer book which Raridan handed him with the places marked. He felt ashamed that the people about him should see that the

places had to be found for him; he wished to have the appearance of being very much at home. He suddenly caught sight of Evelyn Porter's profile far across the church, and presently her father and their guests were disclosed. He soon discovered others that he knew, with surprise that so many men of unimpeachable position in town were there. Here, then, was a stage of development that he had not reckoned with; surely it was a very respectable thing to go to church,—to this church, at least,—on Sunday mornings. The bewilderment of reading and chanting continued, and he wondered whether there would be a sermon; at Doctor Morningstar's the sermon was the main thing. He remembered Captain Wheelock's joke with Raridan, that "the Episcopal Church had neither politics nor religion;" but it was at least very aristocratic.

He stood and seated himself many times, bowing his head on the seat in front of him when the others knelt, and now the great figure of Bishop Delafield came from somewhere in the depths of the chancel and rose in the pulpit. The presence of the bishop reminded him unpleasantly of the Porters' sun-porch and of the disgraceful encounter there. The congregation resettled themselves in their places with a rustle of skirts and a rattling of books into the racks. It was not often that the bishop appeared in his cathedral; he was rarely in his see city on Sundays; but whenever he preached men listened to him. Wheaton was relieved to find that there was to be a cessation of the standing up and sitting down which seemed so complicated.

He now found that he could see the Porter pew easily by turning his head slightly. The roses in

Evelyn's hat were very pretty; he wondered whether she came every Sunday; he concluded that she did; and he decided that he should attend hereafter. The bishop had carried no manuscript into the pulpit with him, and he gave his text from memory, resting one arm on the pulpit rail. He was an august figure in his robes, and he seemed to Wheaton, as he looked up at him, to pervade and possess the place. Wheaton had a vague idea of the episcopal office; bishops were, he imagined, persons of considerable social distinction; in his notion of them they ranked with the higher civil lawgivers, and were comparable to military commandants. In a line with the Porters he could see General Whipple's white head—all the conditions of exalted respectability were present.

And he removed from thence, and digged another well; and for that they strove not: and he called the name of it Rehoboth; and he said, 'For now the Lord hath made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land.'

For now the Lord hath made room for us. The preacher sketched lightly the primal scene to which his text related. He knew the color and light of language and made it seem to his hearers that the Asian plain lay almost at the doors of the cathedral. He reconstructed the simple social life of the early times, and followed westward the campfires of the shepherd kings. He built up the modern social and political structure, with the home as its foundation, before the eyes of the congregation. A broad democracy and humanity dominated the discourse as it unfolded itself. The bishop hardly lifted his voice; he did not rant nor

make gestures, but he spoke as one having authority. Wheaton turned uneasily and looked furtively about. He had not expected anything so earnest as this; there was a tenseness in the air that oppressed him. What he was hearing from that quiet old man in the pulpit was without the gloss of fashion; it was inconsonant with the spirit of the place as he had conceived it. Doctor Morningstar's discourses on Browning's poetry had been far more entertaining.

For now the Lord hath made room for us. The preacher's voice was even quieter as he repeated these words. "We are very near the heart of the world, here at the edge of the great plain. Who of us but feels the freedom, the ampler ether, the diviner air of these new lands? We hear over and over that in the West, men may begin again; that here we may put off our old garments and re-clothe ourselves. We must not too radically adopt this idea. I am not so sanguine that it is an easy matter to be transformed and remade; I am not persuaded that geography enters into heart or mind or soul so that by crossing the older borders into a new land we obliterate old ties. Here we may dig new wells, but we shall thirst often, like David, for a drink of water from the well by the gate of Bethlehem."

Wheaton's mind wandered. It was a pleasure to look about over these well-groomed people; this was what success meant—access to such conditions as these. The fragrance of the violets worn by a girl in the next pew stole over him; it was a far cry to his father's stifling harness shop in the dull little Ohio town. His hand crept to the pin which held his tie in place; he could not give just the touch to an Ascot that Warry

Raridan could, but then Warry had practised longer. The old bishop's voice boomed steadily over the congregation. It caught and held Wheaton's attention once more.

"It is here that God hath made room for us; but it is not that we may begin life anew. There is no such thing as beginning life anew; we may begin again, but we may not obliterate nor ignore the past. Rather we should turn to it more and more for those teachings of experience which build character. Here on the Western plains the light and heat of cloudless skies beat freely upon us; the soul, too, must yield itself to the sun. The spirit of man was not made for the pit or the garret, but for the open."

Wheaton stirred restlessly, so that Raridan turned his head and looked at him. He had been leaning forward, listening intently, and had suddenly come to himself. He crossed his arms and settled back in his seat. A man in front of him yawned, and he was grateful to him. But again his ear caught an insistent phrase.

"Life would be a simple matter if memory did not carry our yesterdays into our to-days, and if it were as easy as Cain thought it was to cast aside the past. A man must deal with evil openly and bravely. He must turn upon himself with reproof the moment he finds that he has been trampling conscience under his feet. An artisan may slight work in a dark corner of a house, thinking that it is hidden forever; but I say to you that we are all builders in the house of life, and that there are no dark corners where we may safely practise deceit or slight the task God assigns us. I would

leave a word of courage and hope with you. Christianity is a militant religion; it strengthens those who stand forth bravely on the battle line, it comforts and helps the weak-hearted, and it lifts up those who fall. I pray that God may freshen and renew courage in us—courage not as against the world, but courage to deal honestly and fairly and openly with ourselves."

The organ was throbbing again; the massive figure had gone from the pulpit; the people were stirring in their seats. The young minister who had read the service repeated the offertory sentences, and the voice of a boy soprano stole tremulously over the congregation. Raridan had left the pew and was passing the plate. The tinkle of coin reassured Wheaton; the return to mundane things brought him relief and restored his confidence. His spirit grew tranquil as he looked about him. The pleasant and graceful things of life were visible again.

The voice of the bishop rose finally in benediction. The choir marched out to a hymn of victory; people were talking as they moved through the aisles to the doors. The organ pealed gaily now; there was light and cheer in the world after all. At the door Wheaton became separated from Raridan, and as he stood waiting at the steps Evelyn and her friends detached themselves from the throng on the sidewalk and got into their carriage. Mr. Porter, snugly buttoned in his frock coat, and with his silk hat tipped back from his forehead, stood in the doorway talking to General Whipple, who was, as usual in crowds, lost from the more agile comrade of his marches many. Wheaton hastened down to the Porter carriage, where the smiles

and good mornings of the occupants gave him further benediction. Evelyn and Miss Warren were nearest him; as he stood talking to them, Belle Marshall espied Raridan across his shoulders.

"Oh, there's Mr. Raridan!" she cried, but when Wheaton stood aside, Raridan had already disappeared around the carriage and had come into view at the opposite window with a general salutation, which included them all, but Miss Marshall more particularly.

"I'm sure that sermon will do you good, Mr. Raridan," the Virginia girl drawled. She was one of those young women who flatter men by assuming that they are very depraved. Even impeccable youngsters are susceptible to this harmless form of cajolery.

"Oh, I'm always good. Miss Porter can tell you that."

"Don't take my name in vain," said Evelyn, covertly looking at him, but turning again to Wheaton.

"You see your witness has failed you. Going to church isn't all of being good."

Wheaton and Evelyn were holding a lively conversation. Evelyn's animation was for his benefit, Raridan knew, and it enraged him. He had been ready for peace, but Evelyn had snubbed him. He was, moreover, standing in the mud in his patent leather shoes while another man chatted with her in greater dignity from the curb. His chaff with Miss Marshall lacked its usual teasing quality; he was glad when Mr. Porter came and took his place in the carriage.

Raridan had little to say as he and Wheaton walked homeward together, though Wheaton felt in duty bound to express his pleasure in the music and, a little less

heartily, in the sermon. Raridan's mind was on something else, and Wheaton turned inward to his own thoughts. He was complacent in his own virtue; he had made the most of the talents God had given him, and in his Sunday evening lectures Doctor Morningstar had laid great stress on this; it was the doctor's idea of the preaching office to make life appear easy, and he filled his church twice every Sunday with people who were glad to see it that way. As Wheaton walked beside Raridan he thought of the venerable figure that had leaned out over the congregation of St. Paul's that morning, and appealed in his own mind from Bishop Delafield to Doctor Morningstar, and felt that the bishop was overruled. As he understood Doctor Morningstar's preaching it dealt chiefly with what the doctor called ideality, and this, as near as Wheaton could make out, was derived from Ruskin, Emerson and Carlyle, who were the doctor's favorite authors. The impression which remained with him of the morning at St. Paul's was not of the rugged old bishop's sermon, which he had already dismissed, but of the novel exercises in the chancel, the faint breath of perfumes that were to him the true odor of sanctity, and what he would have called, if he had defined it, the high-toned atmosphere of the place. The bishop was only an occasional visitor in the cathedral; he was old-fashioned and a crank; but no doubt the regular minister of the congregation preached a cheerfuller idea of life than his bishop, and more of that amiable conduct which is, as Doctor Morningstar was forever quoting from a man named Arnold, three-fourths of life.

When Wheaton reached his room he found an envelope lying on his table, much soiled, and addressed, in an unformed hand, to himself. It contained a dirty scrap of paper bearing these words:

"Jim: I'll be at the Occidental Hotel tonight at 8 o'clock. Don't fail to come. BILLY."

CHAPTER XIII

BARGAIN AND SALE

That is a disastrous moment in the history of any man in which he concludes that the problems of life are easy of solution. Life has been likened by teachers of ethics to a great school, but the comparison is not wholly apt. As an educational system, life is decidedly not up to date; the curriculum lacks flexibility, and the list of easy electives and "snap" courses is discouragingly brief. A reputable poet holds that "life is a game the soul can play"; but the game, it should be remembered, is not always so easy as it looks. It could hardly be said that James Wheaton made the most of all his opportunities, or that he had mastered circumstances, although his biography as printed in the daily press on the occasion of his succession to the mock throne of the Knights of Midas gave this impression with a fine color of truth, and with no purpose to deceive.

The West makes much of its self-made men, and points to them with pride, whenever the self-making includes material gain. The god Success is enthroned on a new Olympus, and all are slaves to him; and when public teachers thunder at him, his humblest subjects smile at one another, and say that it is, no

doubt, well enough to be reminded of such things occasionally, but that, after all, nothing succeeds like success. Life is a series of hazards, and we are all looking for the main chance.

James Wheaton's code of morals was very simple. Honesty he knew to be the best policy; he had learned this in his harsh youth, but he had no instinct for the subtler distinctions in matters of conduct. Behind glass and wire barricades in the bank where he had spent so many of his thirty-five years, he had known little real contact with men. He knew the pains and penalties of overdrafts; and life resolved itself into a formal kind of accountancy where the chief thing was to maintain credit balances. His transfer from a clerical to an official position had widened his horizon without giving him the charts with which to sail new seas. Life had never resolved itself into capital letters in his meditations; he never indulged in serious speculation about it. It was hardly even a game for the soul to play with him; if he had been capable of analyzing his own feelings about it he would have likened it to a mechanical novelty, whose printed instructions are confusingly obscure, but with a little fumbling you find the spring, and presto! the wheels turn and all is very simple.

He tore up the note with irritation and threw it into the waste paper basket. He called the Chinese servant, who explained that a boy had left it in the course of the morning and had said nothing about an answer.

The Bachelors' did not usually muster a full table at Sunday dinner. All Clarkson dined at noon on Sunday, and most of the bachelors were fortunate enough to be asked out. Wheaton was not frequently a diner out

by reason of his more slender acquaintance; and to-day all were present, including Raridan, the most fickle of all in his attendance. It had pleased Wheaton to find that the others had been setting him apart more and more with Raridan for the daily discipline they dealt one another. They liked to poke fun at Raridan on the score of what they called his mad social whirl; there was no resentment about it; they were themselves of sterner stuff and had no patience with Raridan's frivolities; and they were within the fact when they assumed that, if they wished, they could go anywhere that he did. It touched Wheaton's vanity to find himself a joint target with Raridan for the arrows which the other bachelors fired at folly.

The table cheer opened to-day with a debate between Caldwell and Captain Wheelock as to the annual cost to Raridan of the carnation which he habitually wore in his coat. This, in the usual manner of their froth, was treated indirectly; the aim was to continue the cross firing until the victim was goaded into a scornful rejoinder. Raridan usually evened matters before he finished with them; but he affected not to be listening to them now.

"I was reading an article in the Contemporary Review the other day that set me to thinking," he said casually to Wheaton. "It was an effort to answer the old question, 'Is stupidity a sin?' You may not recall that a learned Christian writer—I am not sure but that it was Saint Francis de Sales,—holds that stupidity *is* a sin."

The others had stopped, baffled in their debate over the carnation and were listening to Raridan. They

never knew how much amusement he got out of them; they attributed great learning to him and were never sure when he began in this way whether he was speaking in an exalted spiritual mood and from fullness of knowledge, or was merely preparing a pitfall for them.

Warry continued:

"But while this dictum is very generally accepted among learned theologians, it has nevertheless led to many amusing discussions among men of deep learning and piety who have striven to define and analyze stupidity. It is, however, safe to accept as the consensus of their opinions these conclusions." He made his own salad dressing, and paused now with the oil cruet in his hand while he continued to address himself solely to Wheaton: "Primarily, stupidity is inevitable; in the second place it is an offense not only to Deity but to man; and thirdly, being incurable, as"—nodding first toward Wheelock and then toward Caldwell—"we have daily, even hourly testimony, man is helpless and cannot prevail against it."

"Now will you be good?" demanded Wheaton gleefully. He had an air of having connived at Raridan's fling at them.

"Oh, I don't think!" sneered Caldwell. "Don't you get gay! You're not in this."

"In the name of the saints, Caldwell, do give us a little peace," begged Raridan.

Wheelock turned his attention to the Chinaman who was serving them, and abused him, and Wheaton sought to make talk with Raridan, to emphasize their isolation and superiority to the others.

"That's good music they have at the cathedral," he said.

Brown now took the scent.

"Did you hear that, Wheelock? Well, I'll be damned. See here, Wheaton, where are you at anyhow? We've been looking on you as one of the sinners of this house, but if you've joined Raridan's church, I see our finish."

"Don't worry about your finish, Brown. It'll be a scorcher all right," said Raridan, "and while you wait your turn you might pass the salt."

There was no common room at The Bachelors', and the men did not meet except at the table. They loafed in their rooms, and rarely visited one another. Raridan was the most social among them and lounged in on one or the other in his easy fashion. They in turn sought him out to deride him, or to poke among his effects and to ask him why he never had any interesting books. The books that he was always buying—minor poems and minor essays, did not tempt them. The presence of *L'Illustrazione Italiana* on his table from week to week amused them; they liked to look at the pictures and they had once gone forth in a body to the peanut vender at the next corner, to witness a test of Raridan's Italian, about which they were skeptical. The stormy interview that followed between Raridan and the Sicilian had been immensely entertaining and had proved that Raridan could really buy peanuts in a foreign tongue, though the fine points which he tried to explain to the bachelors touching the differences in Italian dialects did not interest them. Warry himself was interested in Italian dialects for that winter only.

Wheaton went to his room and made himself com-

fortable. He re-read the Sunday papers through all their supplements, dwelling again on the events of the carnival. He had saved all the other papers that contained carnival news, and now brought them out and cut from them all references to himself. He resolved to open a kind of social scrap book in which to preserve a record of his social doings. The joint portraits of the king and queen of the carnival had not been very good; the picture of Evelyn Porter was a caricature. In Raridan's room he had seen a photograph of Evelyn as a child; it was very pretty, and carried him back to his early days in the bank, when the president's daughter was a child and wore her hair in yellow braids down her back. She had lived in a world far removed from him then; but now the chasm had been bridged. He had heard it said in the last year that Evelyn and Warry were undoubtedly fated to marry; but others hinted darkly that some Eastern man would presently appear on the scene.

All this gossip Wheaton turned over in his mind, as he lay on his divan, with the cuttings from the Clarkson papers in his hands. He remembered a complaint often heard in Clarkson that there were no eligible men there; he was not sure just what constituted eligibility, but as he reviewed the men that went about he could not see that they possessed any advantages over himself. It occurred to him for the first time that he was the only unmarried bank cashier in town; and this in itself conferred a distinction. He was not so secure in his place as he should like to be; if Thompson died there would undoubtedly be a reorganization of the bank and the few shares that Porter had sold to him

would not hold the cashiership for him. It might be that Porter's plan was to keep him in the place until Grant grew up. Again, he reflected, the man who married Evelyn Porter would become an element to reckon with; and yet if he were to be that man—

He slept and dreamed that he was king of a great realm and that Evelyn Porter reigned with him as queen; then he awoke with a start to find that it was late. He sat up on the couch and gathered together the newspaper cuttings which had fallen about him. He remembered the imperative summons which had been left for him during the morning; it was already six o'clock. Before going out he changed his clothes to a rough business suit and took a car that bore him rapidly through the business district and beyond, into the older part of Clarkson. The locality was very shabby, and when he left the car presently it was to continue his journey in an ill-lighted street over board walks which yielded a precarious footing. The Occidental Hotel was in the old part of town, and had long ago ceased to be what it had once been, the first hostelry of Clarkson. It had descended to the level of a cheap boarding house, little patronized except by the rougher element of cattlemen and by railroad crews that found it convenient to the yards. Over the door a dim light blinked, and this, it was understood in the neighborhood, meant not merely an invitation to bed and board but also to the Occidental bar, which was accessible at all hours of the day and night, and was open through all the spasms of virtue with which the city administration was seized from time to time.

The door stood open and Wheaton stepped up to the counter on which a boy sat playing with a cat.

"Is William Snyder stopping here?" he asked.

The boy looked up lazily from his play.

"Are you the gent he's expecting?"

"Very likely. Is he in?"

"Yes, he's number eighteen." He dropped the cat and led Wheaton down a dark hall which was stale with the odors of cooked vegetables, up a steep flight of stairs to a landing from which he pointed to an oblong of light above a door.

"There you are," said the boy. He kicked the door and retreated down the stairs, leaving Wheaton to obey the summons to enter which was bawled from within.

William Snyder unfolded his long figure and rose to greet his visitor.

"Well, Jim," he said, putting out his hand. "I hope you're feelin' out of sight." Wheaton took his hand and said good evening. He threw open his coat and put down his hat.

"A little fresh air wouldn't hurt you any," he said, tipping himself back in his chair.

"Well, I guess your own freshness will make up for it," said Snyder.

Wheaton did not smile; he was very cool and master of the situation.

"I came to see what you want, and it had better not be much."

"Oh, you cheer up, Jim," said Snyder with his ugly grin. "I don't know that you've ever done so much for me. I don't want you to forget that I did time for you once."

"You'd better not rely on that too much. I was a poor little kid and all the mischief I ever knew I learned from you. What is it you want now?"

"Well, Jim, you've seen fit to get me fired from that nice lonesome job you got me, back in the country."

"I had nothing to do with it. The ranch owners sent a man here to represent them and I had nothing more to do with it. The fact is I stretched a point to put you in there. Mr. Saxton has taken the whole matter of the ranch out of my hands."

"Well, I don't know anything about that," said Snyder contemptuously. "But that don't make any difference. I'm out, and I don't know but I'm glad to be out. That was a fool job; about the lonesomest thing I ever struck. Your friend Saxton didn't seem to take a shine to me; wanted me to go chasing cattle all over the whole Northwest—"

"He flattered you," said Wheaton, a faint smile drawing at the corners of his mouth.

"None of that kind of talk," returned Snyder sharply. "Now what you got to say for yourself?"

"It isn't necessary for me to say anything about myself," said Wheaton coolly. "What I'm going to say is that you've got to get out of here in a hurry and stay out."

Snyder leaned back in his chair and recrossed his legs on the table.

"Don't get funny, Jim. Large bodies move slow. It took me a long time to find you and I don't intend to let go in a hurry."

"I have no more jobs for you; if you stay about here you'll get into trouble. I was a fool to send you to that

ranch. I heard about your little round with the sheriff, and the gambling you carried on in the ranch house."

"Well, when you admit you're a fool you're getting on," said Snyder with a chuckle.

"Now I'm going to make you a fair offer; I'll give you one hundred dollars to clear out,—go to Mexico or Canada—"

"Or hell or any comfortable place," interrupted Snyder derisively.

"And not come here again," continued Wheaton calmly. "If you do—!"

It was to be a question of bargain and sale, as both men realized.

"Raise your price, Jim," said Snyder. "A hundred wouldn't take me very far."

"Oh yes, it will; I propose buying your ticket myself."

Snyder laughed his ugly laugh.

"Well, you ain't very complimentary. You'd ought to have invited me to your party the other night, Jim. I'd like to have seen you doing stunts as a king. That was the worst,"—he wagged his head and chuckled. "A king, a real king, and your picture put into the papers along of the millionaire's daughter,—well, you may damn me!"

"What I'll do," Wheaton went on undisturbed, "is to buy you a ticket to Spokane to-morrow. I'll meet you here and give you your transportation and a hundred dollars in cash. Now that's all I'll do for you, and it's a lot more than you deserve."

"Oh, no it ain't," said Snyder.

"And it's the last I'll ever do."

"Don't be too sure of that. I want five hundred and a regular allowance, say twenty-five dollars a month."

"I don't intend to fool with you," said Wheaton sharply. He rose and picked up his hat. "What I offer you is out of pure kindness; we may as well understand each other. You and I are walking along different lines. I'd be glad to see you succeed in some honorable business; you're not too old to begin. I can't have you around here. It's out of the question—my giving you a pension. I can't do anything of the kind."

His tone gradually softened; he took on an air of patient magnanimity.

Snyder broke in with a sneer.

"Look here, Jim, don't try the goody-goody business on me. You think you're mighty smooth and you're mighty good and you're gettin' on pretty fast. Your picture in the papers is mighty handsome, and you looked real swell in them fine clothes up at the banker's talkin' to that girl."

"That's another thing," said Wheaton, still standing. "I ought to refuse to do anything for you after that. Getting drunk and attacking me couldn't possibly do you or me any good. It was sheer luck that you weren't turned over to the police."

Snyder chuckled.

"That old preacher gave me a pretty hard jar."

"You ought to be jarred. You're no good. You haven't even been successful in your own particular line of business."

"There ain't nothing against me anywhere," said Snyder, doggedly.

"I have different information," said Wheaton,

blandly. "There was the matter of that post-office robbery in Michigan; attempted bank robbery in Wisconsin, and a few little things of that sort scattered through the country, that make a pretty ugly list. But they say you're not very strong in the profession." He smiled an unpleasant smile.

Snyder drew his feet from the table and jumped up with an oath.

"Look here, Jim, if you ain't playin' square with me—"

"I intend playing more than square with you, but I want you to know that I'm not afraid of you; I've taken the trouble to look you up. The Pinkertons have long memories," he said, significantly.

Snyder was visibly impressed, and Wheaton made haste to follow up his advantage.

"You've got to get away from here, Billy, and be in a hurry about it. How much money have you?"

"Not a red cent."

"What became of that money Mr. Saxton gave you?"

"Well, to tell the truth I owed a few little bills back at Great River and I settled up, like any square man would."

"If you told the truth, you'd say you drank up what you hadn't gambled away." Wheaton moved toward the door.

"At eight to-morrow night."

"Make it two hundred, Jim," whined Snyder.

Wheaton paused in the door; Snyder had followed him. They were the same height as they stood up together.

"That's too much money to trust you with."

"The more money the farther I can get," pleaded Snyder.

"I'll be here at eight to-morrow evening," said Wheaton, "and you stay here until I come."

"Give me a dollar on account; I haven't a cent."

"You're better off that way; I want to find you sober to-morrow night." He went out and closed the door after him.

Two or three men who were sitting in the office below eyed Wheaton curiously as he went out. The thought that they might recognize him from his portraits in the papers pleased him.

He retraced his steps from the hotel and boarded a car filled with people of the laboring class who were returning from an outing in the suburbs. They were making merry in a strange tongue, and their boisterous mirth was an offense to him. He was a gentleman of position returning from an errand of philanthropy, and he remained on the platform, where the atmosphere was purer than that within, which was contaminated by the rough young Swedes and their yellow-haired sweethearts. When he reached The Bachelors' the dozing Chinaman told him that all the others were out. He went to his room and spent the rest of the evening reading a novel which he had heard Evelyn Porter mention the night that he had dined at her house.

The next day he bought a ticket to Spokane, and drew one hundred dollars from his account in the bank. He went at eight o'clock to the Occidental to keep his appointment, and found Snyder patiently waiting for him in the hotel office, holding a shabby valise between his knees.

"You'll have to pay my bill before I take this out," said Snyder grinning, and Wheaton gave him money and waited while he paid at the counter. The proprietor recognized Wheaton and nodded to him. Questions were not asked at the Occidental.

At the railway station Wheaton stepped inside the door and pulled two sealed envelopes from his pocket. "Here's your ticket, and here's your money. The ticket's good through to Spokane; and that's your train, the first one in the shed. Now I want you to understand that this is the last time, Billy; you've got to work and make your own living. I can't do anything more for you; and what's more, I won't."

"All right, Jim," said Snyder. "You won't ever lose anything by helping me along. You're in big luck and it ain't going to hurt you to give me a little boost now and then."

"This is the last time," said Wheaton, firmly, angry at Snyder's hint for further assistance.

Snyder put out his hand.

"Good by, Jim," he said.

"Good by, Billy."

Wheaton stood inside the station and watched the man cross the electric-lighted platform, show his ticket at the gate, and walk to the train. He still waited, watching the car which the man boarded, until the train rolled out into the night.

CHAPTER XIV

THE GIRL THAT TRIES HARD

The Girl That Tries Hard was giving a dance at the Country Club. The Girl That Tries Hard was otherwise Mabel Margrave, wherein lay the only point of difference between herself and other Girls That Try Hard. There was hardly room in Clarkson for cliques; and yet one often heard the expression "Mabel Margrave and her set" and this indicated that Mabel Margrave had a following and that to some extent she was a leader. She prided herself on doing things differently, which is what The Girl That Tries Hard is forever doing everywhere. She was the only girl in the town that gave dinners at the Clarkson Club; and while these functions were not necessarily a shock to the Clarkson moral sense, yet the first of these entertainments, at which Mabel Margrave danced a skirt dance at the end of the dinner, caused talk in conservative circles. It might be assumed that Mabel's father and mother could have checked her exuberance, but the fact was that Mabel's parents wielded little influence in their own household. Timothy Margrave was busy with his railroad and his wife was a timid, shrinking person, who viewed her daughter's social performances with wonder and admiration. It would

have been much better for Mabel if she had not tried so hard, but this was something that she did not understand, and there was no one to teach her. She derived an immense pleasure from her father's private car, in which she had been over most of the United States, and had gone even to Mexico. In the Margrave household it was always spoken of as "the car." Its cook and porter were kept on the pay-roll of the company, but when they were not on active service in the car, one of them drove the Margrave carriage, and the other opened the Margrave front door.

The Margrave house was one of the handsomest in Clarkson. Margrave had not coursed in the orbits of luminaries greater than himself without acquiring wisdom. When he built a house he turned the whole matter over to a Boston architect with instructions to go ahead just as if a gentleman had employed him; he did not want a house which his neighbors could say was exactly what any one would expect of the Margraves. Clarkson was proud of the Margrave house, which was better than the Porter house, though it lacked the setting of the Porter grounds. The architect had done everything; Margrave kept his own hands off and sent his wife and Mabel abroad to stay until it was ready for occupancy. When the house was nearly completed Margrave took Warry Raridan up to see it and displayed with pride a large and handsomely furnished library whose ample shelves were devoid of books.

"Now, Warry," he said, "I want books for this house and I want 'em right. I never read any books, and I never expect to, and I guess the rest of the family ain't

very literary, either. I want you to fill these shelves, and I don't want trash. Are you on?"

The situation appealed to Warry and he had given his best attention to Margrave's request. He took his time and bought a representative library in good bindings. As Mrs. Margrave was a Roman Catholic, Warry thought it well that theological literature should be represented. Mrs. Margrave's parish priest, dining early at the new home, contemplated the "libery," as its owner called it, with amazement.

"Ain't they all there, Father Donovan?" asked Margrave. "I hope you like my selection."

"Couldn't be better," declared the priest, "if I'd picked them myself." He had taken down a volume of a rare edition of Cornelius a Lapide and passed his hand over the Latin title page with a scholar's satisfaction.

Mabel had declined to go to the convent which her mother selected for her; convents were not fashionable; and she herself selected Tyringham because she had once met a Tyringham graduate who was the most "stylish" girl she had ever seen. Since her return from school she had found it convenient to abandon, as far as possible, the church of her baptism. There had been no other Roman Catholics at her school; the Episcopal church was the official spiritual channel of Tyringham; and she brought home a pretty Anglican prayer book, and attended early masses with her mother only to the end that she might go later to the services of St. Paul's, to the scandal of Father Donovan, and somewhat to the sneaking delight of her father. Margrave held that religion of whatever kind was a matter for women,

and that they were entitled to their whim about it.

Tyringham is, it is well known, a place where girls of the proper instinct and spirit acquire a manner that is everywhere unmistakable. Mabel had given new grace and impressiveness to Tyringham itself; she touched nothing that she did not improve, and she came home with an ambition to give tone to Clarkson society. A great phrase with Mabel was The Men; this did not mean the *genus homo* in any philosophical abstraction, but certain young gentlemen that followed much in her train. There were a few young women who were much in Mabel's company and who conscientiously imitated Mabel's ways. All the devices and desires of Mabel's heart tended toward one consummation, and that was the destruction of monotony.

Mabel had announced to a few of her cronies that she would show Evelyn Porter how things were done; and as the Country Club was new, she chose it as the place for her exhibition. Mabel was two years older than Evelyn; they had never been more than casually acquainted, and now that Evelyn's college days were over,—Mabel had "finished" several years before,—and they were to live in the same town, it seemed expedient to the older girl to take the initiative, to the end that their respective positions in the community might be definitely fixed. Evelyn's name carried far more prestige than Mabel's; the Margraves had not been in the Clarkson Blue Book at all, until Mabel came home from school and demonstrated her right to enlistment among the elect.

She dressed herself as sumptuously as she dared for a morning call and drove the highest trap that Clark-

son had ever seen up Porter Hill. The man beside her was the only correctly liveried adjunct of any Clarkson stable,—at least this was Mabel's opinion. Whatever people said of Mabel and her ways, they could not deny that her clothes were good, though they were usually a trifle pronounced in color and cut. She wore about her neck a long, thin chain from which dangled a silver heart. Mabel's was the largest that could be found at any Chicago jeweler's. Its purpose in Mabel's case was to convey to the curious the impression that there was a photograph of a young man inside. This was no fraud on Mabel's part, for she carried in this trinket the photograph of a popular actor, whose pictures were purchasable anywhere in the country at twenty-five cents each. While Mabel waited for Evelyn to appear, she threw open her new driving coat, which forced the season a trifle, and studied the furnishings of the Porter parlor, criticising them adversely. She was not clear in her mind whether she should call Evelyn "Miss Porter" or not. Clarkson people usually said "Evelyn Porter" when speaking of her. In Mabel's own case they all said "Mabel."

When Evelyn came into the parlor she seemed very tall to Mabel, and impulse solved the problem of how to address her.

"Good morning, Miss Porter."

She gave her hand to Evelyn, thrusting it out straight before her, yet hanging back from it archly as if in rebuke of her own forwardness. This was decidedly Tyringhamesque, and was only one of the many amiable and useful things she had learned at Miss Alton's school.

Mabel sat up very straight in her chair when she talked, and played with the silver heart.

"I didn't ask for the others, as it's a wretchedly indecent hour to be making a call."

"Oh, the girls are up and about," said Evelyn. "I shall be glad—"

"Oh, please don't trouble to call them! I came on an errand. You know the Country Club has just taken a new lease of life. Have you been out yet? It's a bit crude"—this phrase was taught as a separate course at Tyringham—"but there's the making of a lovely place there."

"Yes, I've barely seen it. I went out the other day to look at the golf course. The golf wave seems to be sweeping the country."

"Do you play?"

"A little; we had a course near the college that we used."

"You college girls are awfully athletic. I'm crazy about golf. I thought it might be good sport to ask a few girls and some of the men to go to the club for supper,—we really couldn't have dinner there, you know. This heavenly weather won't last always. We'll get a drag and Captain Wheelock will see that I don't drive you into trouble. He's a very safe whip, you know, if I'm not; and we'll come back in the moonlight. This includes your guests, of course."

"That will be delightful," said Evelyn. "I'm sure we'll all be glad to go. I'm anxious to have the girls see as much as possible. I want them to be favorably impressed, and this will be an event."

When Mabel had taken herself off, Evelyn returned

to the tower where Belle Marshall and Annie Warren awaited her. These young women were lounging in the low window-seat exchanging reminiscences of college days.

"It was Mabel Margrave," explained Evelyn. "She's asked us to go coaching with her to the Country Club and have supper there and I took the liberty of accepting for you."

"What's she like?" asked Annie.

"Tyringham," said Evelyn succinctly.

"Oh! your words affect me strangely, child," drawled Belle, casting up her eyes in a pretended imitation of the Tyringham manner.

"How are her *a's?*" asked Annie.

"Broader than the Atlantic. I think she wants to patronize me. She's a real Tyringham in that she thinks us college women very slow."

"Well, they do have a style," said Belle, sighing. "You can always tell one of Miss Alton's girls."

"Yes, there's no doubt about that," retorted Annie coolly. She had taken her education seriously and was disposed to look down upon the product of fashionable boarding schools.

"Cheer up! The worst is yet to come," declared Evelyn. "You'd better not encourage the idea here that we are different from young women of any other sort. I've got to live here! I'm going to be pretty lonely too, the first thing you know, after you desert me."

"You'll have plenty of chances to root for the college," suggested Belle. "You won't have anything like the time I'll have. In Virginia we have traditions that

I've got to reconcile myself to, in some way; out here, you can start even."

"Yes, and we have the Tyringham type, and a few of the convent sort, and a few of the co-eds to combat."

"Well, there's nothing so radically wrong with the co-eds, is there?" asked Annie, who believed in education for its own sake.

"Only the ones that want to go in for politics and that sort of thing. There's a lady—I said lady—doctor of philosophy here in town who casually invited me to become a candidate for school commissioner a few weeks ago."

"I'm not sure that you oughtn't to have done it," said Annie, "assuming that you declined. It would have been a good stroke for alma mater."

"No; that's what it wouldn't have been," said Evelyn seriously. "If you and I believe that college education is good for women, we'd better suppress this notion that's abroad in the world that college makes a woman different. I hold that we're not necessarily unlike our sisters of the convent, or the Tyringham teach-you-how-to-enter-a-room variety." Evelyn drew herself up with an oratorical gesture and inflection. "I'm here to defend my rights as a human being—"

"You will be hit with a pillow in a minute," remarked Belle, rising and preparing to make her threat good. "Let's talk about what to wear to Lady Tyringham's party."

CHAPTER XV

AT THE COUNTRY CLUB

To show that she was not limited to her own particular set in her choice of guests, Mabel had asked Raridan, whom she wished to know better, and Wheaton, who had danced with her at the carnival ball, to be of her party. Chaperons were tolerated but not required in Clarkson. For this reason Mabel had thought it wise to ask Mrs. Whipple, whom she wished to impress; and as she liked to surprise her fellow citizens, it was worth while in this instance to yield something to the *convenances*. The general was too old for such nonsense; but he was willing to sacrifice his wife, and she went, giving as her excuse for taking "that Margrave girl's bait," that she was doing it in Evelyn's interest.

The coach rolled with loud yodeling to the Porter door, where there was much laughing and bantering as the guests settled into their places. When the locked wheels ground the hillside and the horn was bravely blown by an admirer of Mabel's from Keokuk, it was clear to every one that Timothy Margrave's daughter was achieving another triumph. The young man from Keokuk was zealous with the horn; a four-in-hand was not often seen in the streets of Clarkson, albeit this

same vehicle was always to be had from the leading liveryman, and town and country turned admiring eyes on the party as the coach rolled along in the golden haze of early October. The sun warmed the dry air; and far across the Missouri flats its light fell mildly upon yellow bluffs where the clay was exposed in broad surfaces which held the light. The foliage of the hills beyond the river was lit with color in many places; a shower in the morning had freshened the green things of earth, giving them a new, brief lease of life, and there was no dust in the highways. In such a day the dying year bends benignantly to earth and is fain to loiter in the ways of youth.

The paint was still fresh in the club house, which was a long bungalow, set in a clump of cottonwoods. There was an amplitude of veranda, and the rooms within were roughly furnished in Texas pine. The older people of the town looked upon the club with some suspicion as something new and untried. The younger element was just beginning to know the implements and vocabulary of golf. The first tee was only a few feet from the veranda, so that a degree of heroism and Christian resignation was essential in those who began their game under the eyes of a full gallery. There were the usual members of both sexes who talked a good deal about their swing without really having any worth mentioning; and there were others more given to reading the golf news in the golf papers at the club house, than to playing, to the end that they might discuss the game volubly without the discomfort of acquiring practical knowledge.

The walls of the dining-room had not been smoothed

or whitened. They were hung with prints which ranged in subject from golf to Gibson girls. Mabel had supplemented the meager furnishings of the club pantry with embellishments from her own house, and had given her own touch to the table. As her touch carried a certain style, her crystal and silver shone to good advantage under the lamps which she had substituted for the bare incandescents of the room. The young man from Keokuk who was, just then, as the gossips said, "devoted" to Mabel, had supplied a prodigal array of flowers, ordered by telegraph from Chicago for the occasion. The table was served by colored men, who had been previously subsidized by Mabel, in violation of the club rules; and they accordingly made up in zeal what they lacked in skill.

Mabel talked a great deal about informality, and drove her guests into the dining-room without any attempt at order, and they found their name-cards with the surprises and exclamations which usually characterize that proceeding.

Captain Wheelock sat at the end of the oblong table opposite Mabel, who placed the man from Keokuk at her right and Raridan at her left. Evelyn was between Raridan and one of Mabel's "men," who was evidently impressed by this propinquity. He was the Assistant General Something of one of the railroads and owned a horse that was known as far away from home as the Independence, Iowa, track. There was a great deal of talking back and forth, and Evelyn told herself that it did not much matter that her guests had fallen into rather poor hands. She was quite sure that Captain Wheelock, who liked showy girls, would

not be much interested in Annie Warren, who was distinctly not showy. Belle Marshall, with her drollery, was not likely to be dismayed by Wheaton's years and poverty of small talk. Belle was not easily abashed, and when the others paused now and then under the spell of her dialect, which seemed funny when she did not mean it to be so, she was not distressed. She had grown used to having people listen to her drawl, and to complimentary speeches from "you No'the'ne's" on her charming accent. Evelyn found that it was unnecessary to talk to Raridan; he and Mabel seemed to get on very well together, and in her pique at him, Evelyn was glad to have it so.

Mabel's supper was bountiful, and Raridan, who thought he knew the possibilities of the club's cuisine, marveled at the chicken, fried in Maryland style, and at the shoestring potatoes and flaky rolls, which marked an advance on anything that the club kitchen had produced before. There was champagne from the stock which the Margraves carried in their car, and it foamed and bubbled in the Venetian glasses that Mabel had brought from home, at a temperature that Mabel herself had regulated. Captain Wheelock made much of frequently lifting his glass to Mabel in imaginary toasts. The man from Keokuk drank his champagne with awe; he had heard that Mabel Margrave was a "tank," and he thought this a delightful thing to be said of a girl. Mrs. Whipple noted with wonder Mabel's capacity, while most of the others tried not to be conscious of it. Mabel grew a little boisterous at times through the dinner, but no one dared think that it was the champagne. Mrs. Whipple remembered

with satisfaction that she had no son to marry Mabel. There were, she considered, certain things which one escapes by being childless, and a bibulous daughter-in-law was one of them.

Attention was arrested for a time by a colloquy between Mrs. Whipple and Captain Wheelock as to the merits of army girls compared with their civilian sisters; and the whole table gave heed. Wheelock maintained that the army girl was the only cosmopolitan type of American girl, and Mrs. Whipple combated the idea. She took the ground that American girls are never provincial; that they all wear the same clothes, though, she admitted, they wore them with a difference; and that the army girl as a distinct type was a myth.

"My furniture," she said, "has followed the flag as much as anybody's; but the army girl is only a superstition among fledgling lieutenants. On my street are people from Maine, Indiana and Georgia. You don't have to go to the army to find cosmopolitan young women; they are the first generation after the founders of all this western country. Right here in the Missouri valley are the real Americans, made by the mingling of elements from everywhere. Am I stepping on anybody's toes?" she asked, looking around suddenly.

"Oh, don't mind us," drawled Belle, turning with a mournful air to Annie.

"We're counting on you to marry and settle amongst us," said Mrs. Whipple palliatingly.

"Gentlemen!" exclaimed Raridan, looking significantly from one man to another; "destiny is pointing to us!"

"You're in no danger, Mr. Raridan," Belle flung

back at him. "Miss Warren and I can go back where we came from."

Raridan's rage at Evelyn had spent itself; he was ready for peace. She had been politely indifferent to him at the table, to the mischievous joy of Belle Marshall, who had an eye for such little bits of comedy. As they all stood about after supper in the outer hall, Evelyn chatted with Wheaton, and continued to be oblivious of Raridan, who watched her over the shoulder of one of Mabel's particular allies and waited for a tête-à-tête. Warry had the skill of long practice in such matters; there were men whom it was difficult to dislodge, but Wheaton was not one of them. He took advantage of a movement toward benches and chairs to attach himself to Evelyn and to shunt Wheaton into Belle's company,—a manœuver which that young woman understood perfectly and did not enjoy. There was something so open and casual in Warry's tactics that the beholder was likely to be misled by them. Evelyn was half disposed to thwart him; he had been distinctly disagreeable at the ball, and had not appeared at the house since. She knew what he wanted, and she had no intention of making his approaches easy. Some of the others moved toward the verandas, and Warry led the way thither, while he talked on, telling some bits of news about a common acquaintance from whom he had just heard. It was cool outside and she sent him for her cape, and then they walked the length of the long promenade. He paused several times to point out to her some of the improvements which were to be made in the grounds the following spring. This also was a part of the game; it served to interrupt the walk; and he

spoke of the guests at the Hill, and said that it was too bad they had not come when things were livelier. Then he stood silent for a moment, busy with his cigarette. Evelyn gathered her golf cape about her, leaned against a pillar and tapped the floor with her shoe.

"You haven't been particularly attentive to them, have you?" she said. "I thought you really liked them."

"Of course I like them, but I've been very busy." Warry stared ahead of him across the dim starlit golf grounds.

"That's very nice," she said, still tapping the floor and looking past him into the night. "Industry is always an excuse for any one. But, come to think of it, you were very good in showing them about at the ball. I appreciate it, I'm sure."

It was of his conduct at the ball that he wished to speak: she knew it, and tried to make it hard for him.

"See here, Evelyn, you know well enough why I kept away from you that night. I told you before the ball that I didn't,—well, I didn't like it! If I hadn't cared a whole lot it wouldn't have made any difference—but that show was so tawdry and hideous—"

Evelyn readjusted her cape and sat down on the veranda railing.

"Oh, I was tawdry, was I?" she asked, sweetly. "I knew some one would tell me the real truth about it if I waited."

"I didn't come here to have you make fun of me," he said, bitterly. He imagined that since the ball he had been suffering a kind of martyrdom.

Evelyn could not help laughing.

"Poor Warry!" she exclaimed in mock sympathy. "What a hard time you make yourself have! Just listen to Mr. Foster laughing on the other side of the porch; it must be much cheerfuller over there." Mr. Foster was the young man from Keokuk; he wore a secret society pin in his cravat, and Warry hated him particularly.

"What an ass that fellow is!" he blurted, savagely. He had just lighted a fresh cigarette, and threw away the stump of the discarded one with an unnecessary exercise of strength.

"But he's cheerful, and has very nice manners!" said Evelyn. Warry was still looking away from her petulantly. Her attitude toward him just now was that of an older sister toward a young offending brother. He felt that the interview lacked dignity on his side, and he swung around suddenly.

"You know we can't go on this way. You know I wouldn't offend you for anything in the world,—that if I've been churlish it's simply because I care a great deal; because it has hurt me to find you getting mixed up with the wrong people. If you knew what your coming home meant to me, how much I've been counting on it! and then to find that you wouldn't meet me on our old friendly basis, and didn't want any suggestions from me."

He had, almost unconsciously, been expecting her to interrupt him; but she did not do so, and left him to flounder along as best he could. When he paused helplessly, she said, still like a forbearing sister:

"I didn't know you could be so tragic, Warry. The first thing I know you'll be really quarreling with me,

and I don't intend to have that. Why don't you change your tactics and be a good little boy? You've been spoiled by too much indulgence of late. Now I don't intend to spoil you a bit. You were terribly rude,—I didn't think you capable of it, and all because I wouldn't offend my father and his friends and other very good people, by refusing to take part in the harmless exercises of that perfectly ridiculous but useful society, the Knights of Midas. That's all over now; and the sun comes up every morning just as it used to. You and I live in the same small town and it's too small to quarrel in."

She paused and laughed, seeing how he was swaying between the impulse to accept her truce and the inclination to parley further. He had been persuading himself that he loved her, and he had found keen joy in the misery into which he had worked himself, thinking that there was something ideal and noble in his attitude. He did not know Evelyn as well as he thought he did; when she came home he had imagined that all would go smoothly between them; he had meant to monopolize her, and to dictate to her when need be. He had assumed that they would meet on a plane that would be accessible to no other man in Clarkson; and his conceit was shaken to find that she was disposed to be generously hospitable toward all. It was this that enraged him particularly against Wheaton, who stood quite as well with her, he assured himself, as he did. Her beauty and sweetness seemed to mock him; if he did not love her now as he thought he did, he at least was deeply appreciative of the qualities which set her apart from other women.

There are men like Raridan, who are devoid of evil impulse, and who are swayed and touched by the charm of women through an excess in themselves of that nicer feeling which we call feminine, usually in depreciation, as if it were contemptible. But there is something appealing and fine about it; it is not altogether a weakness; doers of the world's worthiest tasks have been notable possessors of this quality. Raridan had a true sense of personal honor, and yet his imagination was strong enough to play tricks with his conscience. He had argued himself into a mood of desperate love; he felt that he was swayed by passion; but it was of jealousy and not of love.

Evelyn walked a little way toward the door and he followed gloomily along. He called her name and she paused. They were not alone on the veranda, and she did not want a scene. Raridan began again:

"Why, ever since we were children together I've looked forward to this time. It always seemed the most natural thing in the world that I should love you. When you went away to college, I never had any fear that it would make any difference; when I saw you down there you were always kind,—"

"Of course I was kind," she interrupted; "and I don't mean to be anything else now."

"You know what I mean," he urged, though he did not know himself what he meant. "I had no idea that your going away would make any difference; if I had dreamed of it, I should have spoken long ago. And when I went to see you those few times at college—"

"Yes, you came and I was awfully glad to see you,

too; but how many women's colleges have you visited in these four years? There was that Brooklyn girl you were devoted to at Bryn Mawr; and that pretty little French Canadian you rushed at Wellesley,—but of course I don't pretend to know the whole catalogue of them. That was all perfectly proper, you understand; I'm not complaining—"

"No; I wish you were," he said, bitterly. If he had known it, he was really enjoying this; there was, perhaps, at the bottom of his heart, a little vanity which these reminiscences appealed to. He rallied now:

"But you could afford to have me see other girls," he said. "You ought to know—you should have known all the time that you were the only one in all the world for me."

"That's a trifle obvious, Warry;" and she laughed. "You're not living up to your reputation for subtlety of approach."

"Evelyn"—his voice trembled; he was sure now that he was very much in love; "I tried to tell you before the carnival that the reason I didn't want you to appear in the ball was that I cared a great deal,—so very much,—that I love you!"

She stepped back, drawing the cape together at her throat.

"Please, Warry," she said pleadingly, "don't spoil everything by talking of such things. I wished that we might be the best of friends, but you insist on spoiling everything."

"Oh, I know," he broke in, "that I spoil things, that I'm a failure—a ne'er-do-well." It was not love that

he was hungry for half so much as sympathy; they are often identical in such natures as his.

She bent toward him, as she always did when she talked earnestly, and as frankly as though she were speaking to a girl.

"Warry Raridan, it's exactly as I told you a moment ago. You've been spoiled, and it shows in a lot of ways. Why, you're positively childish!" She laughed softly. He had thrust his hands into his pockets and was feeling foolish. He wanted to make another effort to maintain his position as a serious lover, but was not equal to it. She went on, with growing kindness in her tone: "Now, I'll say to you frankly that I didn't at all like being mixed up in the Knights of Midas ball; if you had been as wise as I have always thought, you might have known it. You ought to have shown your interest in me by helping me; but you chose to take a very ungenerous and unkind attitude about it; you helped to make it harder for me than it might have been. I relied on you as an old friend, but you deserted me at your first chance to show that you really had my interests at heart. If you had cared about me, you certainly wouldn't have acted so."

"Why, Evelyn, I wouldn't hurt you for anything in the world; if I had understood—"

"But that's the trouble," she interrupted, still very patiently. She saw that she had struck the right chord in appealing to his chivalry, and in conceding as much as she had by the reference to their old comradeship. She had never liked him better than she did now; but she certainly did not love him.

She had directed the talk safely into tranquil chan-

nels, and he was growing happier, and, if he had known it, relieved besides. He wanted to be nearer to her than any one else, and he was touched by her declaration that she had needed him, and that he had failed her.

"But sometime—you will not forget—"

"Oh, sometime! we are not going to bother about that now. Just at present it's getting too cool for the open air and we must go inside."

"But is it all right? You will pardon my offenses, won't you? And you won't let any one else—"

"Oh, you must be careful, and very good," she answered lightly, and gathered up her skirts in her hand. "We must go in, and," she looked down at him, laughing, "there must be a smile on the face of the tiger!"

A fire of piñon logs, brought from the Colorado hills, blazed in the wide fireplace at the end of the hall, and Evelyn and Warry joined the circle which had formed about it.

"Has the moon gone down?" asked Captain Wheelock, as a place was made for them.

"Not necessarily," said Raridan coolly. "Anybody but you would know that the moon isn't due yet."

"It was getting cool outside," said Evelyn, finding a seat in the ingle-nook.

"Oh!" exclaimed the captain significantly, and looking hard at Raridan. "Poor Mr. Raridan! The weather bureau has hardly reported a single frost thus far, and yet—and yet!" The others laughed, and Evelyn looked at him reproachfully.

"You might try the weather conditions yourself," said Raridan easily, wishing to draw the fire to him-

self. "But at your age a man must be careful of the night air."

He and Wheelock abused each other until the others begged them to desist; then some one attacked the piano and a few couples began to dance. Mabel was anxious to stimulate the interest of the young man from Keokuk, who had not thus far manifested sufficient courage to lead her off for a tête-à-tête. He had proved a little slow, and she sought to treat him cruelly by seeming very much interested in Raridan, who sat down to talk to her. Warry was certainly much more distinguished than any other young man in Clarkson,—a conclusion which was, in her mind, based on the fact that Warry lived without labor. The pilgrim from Keokuk was the vice-president of an elevator company, and it seemed to her much nobler to live on the income of property that had been acquired by one's ancestors than to be immediately concerned in earning a livelihood. She and Warry took several turns about the hall to the waltz which Belle Marshall was playing, and when the music ceased suddenly they were in a far corner of the room. The chain on which her heart pendant hung caught on a button of Raridan's coat as they stopped, and he took off his glasses to find and loosen the tangle, while she stood in a kind of triumphant embarrassment, knowing that Evelyn could see them from her corner by the fire. After the chain had been freed she led the way to the window seat and sat down with a great show of fatigue from her dance.

"A girl that wears her heart on a chain is likely to have daws pecking at it, isn't she?" suggested Raridan,

wiping his glasses, and looking at her with the vagueness of near-sighted eyes. This was, he knew, somewhat flirtatious; but he could no more help saying such things to young women than he could help his good looks. The fact that he had a few moments before been making love to another girl, with what he believed at the time to be real ardor, did not deter him. Mabel was a girl, and therefore pretty speeches were to be made to her. She was unmistakably handsome, and a handsome girl, in particular, deserves a man's tribute of admiration. Mabel was not, however, used to Raridan's methods; the men she had known best did not paraphrase Shakspere to her. But it was very agreeable to be sitting thus with the most eligible and brilliant young man of Clarkson. Evelyn Porter, she could see, was entertaining the young man from Keokuk, and the situation pleased her.

"Oh, the chain is strong enough to hold it," she answered, running the slight strands through her fingers, and looking up archly. Her black eyes were fine; she exercised a kind of witchery with them.

"Lucky chap—the victim inside," continued Raridan, indicating the heart.

"Well, that depends on the way you look at it."

"I hope he knows," continued Warry. "It would be a shame for a man to enjoy that kind of distinction and not know it."

Mabel held the silver heart in one hand and stroked it carefully with the other. Most of the men she knew would be capable of taking the heart, even at the cost of a scuffle, and looking into it. She felt safe with Raridan. The young romantic actor whose picture en-

joyed the distinction of a place in the trinket did not know, of course, and would have been bored if he had.

"It would hardly be fair to carry his picture around if he didn't know it, would it?" asked Mabel.

"Of course not," said Warry; "I didn't imagine that you bought it!"

"It wouldn't be nice for you to," said Mabel. The fact that she had acquired it for twenty-five cents at a local bookstore did not trouble her.

The music had begun again, but they continued talking, though others were dancing. Wheaton had joined Evelyn in the ingle-nook; and Evelyn was aware, without looking, that Mabel was making the most of her opportunity with Raridan; and she knew, too, that he was not averse to a bit of by-play with her. She knew that if she really cared for him it would hurt her to see him thus talking to another girl, but she was conscious of no pang. Her heart burned with anger for a moment at the thought that he must think her conquest assured; but this was, she remembered, "Warry's way," falling back on a phrase that was often spoken of him. She was a little tired, and experienced a feeling of relief in sitting here with Wheaton and listening to his commonplace talk, which could be followed without effort.

Wheaton was finding himself much at ease at Mabel's party, though he questioned its propriety; he had a great respect for conventions. He was well aware that there were differences between Evelyn Porter and her friends, and Miss Margrave and those whom he knew to be her intimates. Miss Porter was much finer in her instincts and her intelligence; he would have been puzzled for an explanation of the points of variance, but

he knew that they existed. The young man from Keokuk had moved away and left him with Evelyn, and it was certainly very pleasant to be sitting in a quiet corner with a girl whom everybody admired, and who was, he felt sure, easily the most distinguished girl in town. He had arrived late, to be sure, in the first social circle of Clarkson, but he had found the gate open, and he was suffered to enter and make himself at home just as thoroughly as any other man might—as completely so, for instance, as Warrick Raridan, who had wealth and the prestige of an old family behind him.

"I'm sure we shall all get much pleasure out of the Country Club," said Evelyn, who sat on the low bench between him and the fire.

"Yes, and the house is pretty good, considering the small amount of money that was put into it."

"Another case where good taste is better than money. We Americans have been so slow about such things; but now there seems to be widespread interest in outdoor life." Wheaton knew only vaguely that there was, but he was learning that it was not necessary to know much about things to be able to talk of them; so he acquiesced, and they fell to discussing golf, or at least Evelyn did, with the zeal of the fresh convert.

"I think I'll have to take it up. You make it sound very attractive."

"The Scotch owed us something good," said Evelyn; "they gave us oatmeal for breakfast, and made life unendurable to that extent. But we can forgive them if they take us out of doors and get us away from offices and houses. Our western business men are in-

corrigible, though. The farther west you go, the more hours a day men put into business."

Evelyn soon sent Wheaton to bring Mrs. Whipple and Annie Warren, who were stranded in a corner, and they became spectators of the pranks of some of the others, who had now gathered about the piano, where Captain Wheelock had undertaken to lead in the singing of popular airs. The singers were not taking their efforts very seriously. All knew some of the words of "Annie Carroll," but none knew all, so that their efforts were marked by scattering good-will rather than by unanimity of knowledge. When one lost the words and broke down, they all laughed in derision. Mabel and Raridan had joined the circle, and Warry entered into the tentative singing with the spirit he always brought to any occasion. Mabel, who imported all the new songs from New York, gave "Don't Throw Snowballs at the Soda-water Man" as a solo, and did it well—almost too well. Occasionally one of the group at the piano turned to demand that those who lingered by the fireside join in the singing, but Wheaton was shy of this hilarity, and was comfortable in his belief that Evelyn was showing a preference for him in electing to remain aloof. He did not understand that her evident preference was due to a feeling that he was older than the rest and too stiff and formal for their frivolity.

Mrs. Whipple made little effort to talk to Wheaton, though she occasionally threw out some comment on the singers to Evelyn. Wheaton did not amuse Mrs. Whipple. He had only lately dawned on her horizon, and she had already appraised him and filed her impression away in her memory. He was not, she

had determined, a complex character; she knew, as perfectly as if he had made a full confession of himself to her, his new ambitions, his increasing conceit and belief in himself. She had been more successful in preventing marriages than in effecting them, and she sat watching him with a quizzical expression in her eyes, for there might be danger in him for this girl, though it had not appeared. But when her eyes rested on Evelyn she seemed to find an answer that allayed her fears; Evelyn was hardly a girl that would need guardianship. As the noise from the group at the piano rose to the crescendo at which it broke into laughing discord, Evelyn met suddenly the gaze with which this old friend had been regarding her, and gave back a nod and smile that were in themselves unconsciously reassuring.

Some one suggested presently that if they were to drive home in the moonlight they should be going; and the coach soon swung away from the door into the moon's floodtide. The wind was still, as if in awe of the lighted world. The town lay far below in a white pool. Mabel again took the reins, and as the coach rumbled and crunched over the road, light hearts had recourse to song; but even the singing was subdued, and the trumpeter's note failed miserably when the horses' hoofs struck smartly on the streets of the town.

CHAPTER XVI

THE LADY AND THE BUNKER

The afternoon invited the eyes to far, blue horizons, and as Evelyn stood up and shook loosely in her hand the sand she had taken from the box, she contemplated the hazy distances with satisfaction before bending to make her tee. Her visitors had left; Grant had gone east to school, and she was driven in upon herself for amusement. Her movements were lithe and swift, and when once the ball had been placed in position there were only two points of interest for her in the landscape—the ball itself and the first green. The driver was a part of herself, and she stepped back and swung it to freshen her memory of its characteristics. The caddy watched her in silent joy; these were not the fussy preliminaries that he had been used to in young ladies who played on the Country Club links; he kept one eye on the player and backed off down the course. The sleeves of her crimson flannel shirt-waist were turned up at the wrists; the loose end of her cravat fluttered in the soft wind, that was like a breath of mid-May. She addressed the ball, standing but slightly bent above it and glancing swiftly from tee to target, then swung with the certainty and ease of the natural golf player. Her first ball was a slice, but it

fell seventy-five yards down the course; she altered her position slightly and tried again, but she did not hit the ball squarely, and it went bounding over the grass. At the third attempt her ball was caught fairly and sped straight down the course at a level not higher than her head. The caddy trotted to where it lay; it was on a line with the one hundred and fifty yard mark. The player motioned him to get the other balls. She had begun her game.

The fever was as yet in its incipient stage in Clarkson; players were few; the greens were poorly kept, and there were bramble patches along the course which were of material benefit to the golf ball makers. But it was better than nothing, John Saxton said to himself this bright October afternoon, as he stood at the first tee, listening to the cheerful discourse of his caddy, who lingered to study the equipment of a visitor whom he had not served before.

"Anybody out?" asked John, trying the weight of several drivers.

"Lady," said the boy succinctly. He pointed across the links to where Evelyn was distinguishable as she doubled back on the course.

"Good player?"

"Great—for a girl," the boy declared. "She's the best lady player here."

"Maybe we can pick up some points from her game," said Saxton, smiling at the boy's enthusiasm. He had been very busy and much away from town, and this was his first day of golf since he had come to Clarkson. Raridan had declined to accompany him; Raridan was, in fact, at work just now, having been for a month

constant in attendance upon his office; and Saxton had left him barricaded behind a pile of law books. Saxton was slow in his golf, as in all things, and he gave a good deal of study to his form. He played steadily down the course, noting from time to time the girl that was the only other occupant of the links. She was playing toward him on the parallel course home, and while he had not recognized her, he could see that she was a player of skill, and he paused several times to watch the freedom of her swing and to admire the pretty picture she made as she followed her ball rapidly and with evident absorption.

He was taking careful measurement for a difficult approach shot from the highest grass on the course, when he heard men calling and shouting in the road which ran by one of the boundary fences of the club property. A drove of cattle was coming along the road, driven, as Saxton saw, by several men on horseback. It was a small bunch bound for the city. Several obstreperous steers showed an inclination to bolt at the crossroads, but the horsemen brought them back with much yelling and a great shuffling of hoofs which sent a cloud of dust into the quiet air. Saxton bent again with his lofter, when his caddy gave a cry.

"Hi! He's making for the gate!"

One of the steers had bolted and plunged down the side road toward the gate of the club grounds, which stood open through the daytime.

"You'd better trot over there and close the gate," said Saxton, seeing that the cattle were excited.

The boy ran for the gate, which lay not more than a hundred yards distant, and the steer which had broken

away and been reclaimed with so much difficulty in the roadway bolted for it at almost the same moment. Saxton, seeing that a collision was imminent, began trotting toward the gate himself. The steer could not see the boy who was racing for the gate from the inside, and boy and beast plunged on toward it.

"Run for the fence," called Saxton.

The boy gained the fence and clambered to the top of it. The steer reached the gate, and, seeing open fields beyond, bounded in and made across the golf course at full speed. He dashed past Saxton, who stopped and watched him, his club still in his hand. The steer seemed pleased to have gained access to an ampler area, and loped leisurely across the links. Evelyn, manœuvering to escape a bunker that lay formidably before her, had not yet seen the animal and was not aware of the invasion of the course until her caddy, who, expecting one of her long plays, had posted himself far ahead, came plunging over the bunker's ridge with a clatter of bag and clubs. The steer, following him with an amiable show of interest, paused at the bunker and viewed the boy and the young woman in the red shirt waist uneasily. One of the drovers was in hot pursuit, galloping across the course toward the runaway member of his herd, lariat in hand. Hearing an enemy in the rear, the steer broke over the lightly packed barricade, and Evelyn's red shirt-waist proving the most brilliant object on the horizon, he made toward it at a lively pace.

The caddy was now in full flight, pulling the strap of Evelyn's bag over his head and scattering the clubs as he fled. A moment later he had joined Saxton's caddy on top of the fence and the two boys viewed current

history from that point with absorption. Meanwhile Evelyn was making no valiant stand. She gave a gasp of dismay and turned and ran, for the drover was pushing the steer rapidly now, and was getting ready to cast his lariat. He made a botch of it, however, and at the instant of the rope's flight, his pony, poorly trained to the business, bucked and tried to unseat his rider; and the drover swore volubly as he tried to control him. The pony backed upon a putting green and bucked again, this time dislodging his rider. Before the dazed drover could recover, Saxton, who had run up behind him, sprang to the pony's head, and as the animal settled on all fours again, leaped into the saddle and gathered up bridle and lariat. The pony suddenly grew tired of making trouble, in the whimsical way of his kind, and Saxton impelled him at a rapid lope toward the steer. John was bareheaded and the sleeves of his outing shirt were rolled to the elbows; he looked more like a polo player than a cowboy.

Meanwhile Evelyn was running toward a bunker which stood across her path; it was the only break in the level of the course that offered any hope of refuge. She could hear the pounding of the steer's hoofs, and less distinctly the pattering hoofbeat of the pony. She had had a long run and was breathing hard. The bunker seemed the remotest thing in the world as she ran down the course; then suddenly it rose a mile high, and as she scaled its rough slope and sank breathlessly into the sand, Saxton cast the lariat. With mathematical nicety the looped rope cut the air and the noose fell about the broad horns of the Texan as his fore feet struck the bunker. The pony stood with firmly planted

hoofs, supporting the taut rope as steadfastly as a rock. The owner of the pony came panting up, and another of the drovers who had ridden into the arena joined them.

"Here's your cow," said Saxton. The steer was, indeed, any one's for the taking, as he was winded and the spirit had gone out of him. "You won't need another rope on him; he'll follow the pony."

"You threw that rope all right," said the dismounted drover.

"An old woman taught me with a clothes line," said John, kicking his feet out of the stirrups; "take your pony."

"Where's that girl?" asked one of the men.

"I guess she's all right," answered Saxton, walking toward the bunker. "You'd better get your cow out of here; this isn't free range, you know."

He mounted the bunker with a jump and looked anxiously down into the sand-pit.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Saxton. You see I'm bunkered. Is it safe to come out?"

"Is it you, Miss Porter?" said Saxton, jumping down into the sand. "Are you hurt?"

"No; but I'll not say that I'm not scared." She was still panting from her long run, and her cheeks were scarlet. She put up her hands to her hair, which had tumbled loose. "This is really the wild West, after all; and that was a very pretty throw you made."

"It seemed necessary to do something. But you couldn't have seen it?"

"Another case of woman's curiosity. Perhaps I ought to turn into a pillar of salt. I peeped! I suppose it was in the hope that I might play hide and seek with that

wild beast as he came over after me, but you stopped his flight just in time." She had restored her hair as she talked. "Where is that caddy of mine?"

"Oh, the boys took to the fence to get a better view of the show. They're coming up now."

Evelyn stood up quickly, and shook her skirt free of sand.

"I need hardly say that I'm greatly obliged to you," she said, giving him her hand.

Saxton was relieved to find that she took the incident so coolly.

She was laughing; her color was very becoming, and John beamed upon her. His face was of that blond type which radiates light and flushes into a kind of sunburn with excitement. There was something very boyish about John Saxton. The curves of his face were still those of youth; he had never dared to encourage a mustache or beard, owing to a disinclination to produce more than was necessary of the soft, silky hair which covered his head abundantly. He had a straight nose, a firm chin and a brave showing of square, white teeth. His mouth was his best feature, for it expressed his good nature and a wish to be pleased,—a wish that shone also in his blue eyes. John Saxton was determined to like life and people; and he liked both just now.

"Are you entirely sound? Won't you have witch-hazel, arnica, brandy?"

"Oh, thanks; nothing. I've got my breath again and am all right."

"But they always sprain their ankles."

"Yes, but I'm not a romantic young person. I'll be sorry if that caddy has lost my best driver."

"He's out on the battlefield now looking for it," said John, indicating their two caddies, who were gathering up the lost implements.

"I think you're away," John added, musingly.

"Yes; for the club house."

"That's poor golf, to give up just because you're bunkered. And yet my caddy said you were the greatest."

They walked over the course toward the club house, discussing their encounter.

"What hole were you playing when the meek-eyed kine invaded the field?"

"Oh, I was doing very badly. I was only at the fourth, and breaking all my records," said John. "I was glad of a diversion. The gentle footprints of that steer didn't improve the quality of this course," he added, looking about. The ground was soft from recent rains, and the hoofs of the animal had dug into it and marred the turf.

"It's a rule of the club," said Evelyn, "that players must replace their own divots. That can hardly be enforced against that ferocious beast."

"Hardly; but he was easily master of the game while he remained with us." The caddies had recovered the scattered equipment of the players, and were following, discussing the incidents of the busiest quarter of an hour they had known in their golfing experience.

Evelyn turned suddenly upon John.

"Did I look very foolish?" she demanded.

"I'm sure I don't know what you mean."

"Yes, you do, Mr. Saxton. A woman always looks ridiculous when she runs." She laughed. "I'm sure I must have looked so. But you couldn't have seen me; you were pretty busy yourself just then."

"Well, of course, if I'm asked about it, I'll have to tell of your sprinting powers; I'm not sure that you didn't lower a record."

"Oh, you're the hero of the occasion! I cut a sorry figure in it. I suppose, though, that as the maiden in distress I'll get a little glory—just a little."

"And your picture in the Sunday papers."

"Horrors, no! But you will appear on your fiery steed swinging the lasso."

He threw up his hands.

"That would never do! It would ruin my social reputation."

"In Boston?"

"No; down there they'd like it. It would be proof positive of the woolliness of the West. Golf playing interrupted by a herd of wild cattle—cowboys, lassoes—Buffalo Bill effects. Down East they're always looking for Western atmosphere."

"You don't dislike the West very much, do you?" asked Evelyn. "We aren't so bad, do you think?"

"Dislike it?" John looked at her. He had never liked anything so much as this place and hour. "I altogether love it," he declared; and then he was conscious of having used a verb not usual in his vocabulary.

"And so you learned how to do all the cowboy tricks up in Wyoming?" Evelyn went on. "I wish Annie

Warren had seen that!" and she laughed; it seemed to John that she was always laughing.

"I wasn't very much of a cowboy," John said. "That is, I wasn't very good at it." He was an honest soul and did not want Evelyn Porter to think that he was posing as a dramatic and cocksure character. "Roping a cow is the easiest thing in the business, and then a tame, foolish, domestic co-bos like that one!"

"Co-bos! If this is likely to happen again they ought to provide a box of salt at every tee."

When Evelyn had gone into the club house, John gathered the caddies into a corner and bestowed a dollar on each of them and promised them other bounty if they maintained silence touching the events of the afternoon in which he had participated. They and the drovers were the only witnesses besides the more active participants, and he would have to take chances with the drovers. Then, having bribed the boys, he also threatened them. He was walking across the veranda when he met Evelyn, whose horse he had already called for.

"If you're not driving, I'd be glad to have you share my cart."

"Thanks, very much," said John. "The street car would be rather a heavy slump after this afternoon's gaiety."

"I spoiled your game and endangered your social reputation; I can hardly do less."

John thought that she could hardly do more. He had known men whom girls drove in their traps, but he had never expected to be enrolled in their class. It was

pleasant, just once, not to be walking in the highway and taking the dust of other people's wheels—pleasant to find himself tolerated by a pretty girl. She was prettier than any he had ever seen at class day, or in the grand stands at football games, or on the observation trains at New London, when he had gone alone, or with a sober college classmate, to see the boat races.

Deep currents of happiness coursed through him which were not all because of the October sunlight and the laughing talk of Evelyn Porter. He had that sensation of pleasure, always a joy to a man of conscience, which is his self-approval for labor well performed. He had worked faithfully ever since he had come to Clarkson; he had traveled much, visiting the properties which the Neponset Trust Company had confided to his care; and he had already so adjusted them that they earned enough to pay taxes and expenses. He had effected a few sales, at prices which the Neponset's clients were glad to accept. He had never been so happy in his work. He had rather grudgingly taken this afternoon off; but here he was, laughing with Evelyn Porter over an amusing adventure that had befallen them, and which, as they talked of it and kept referring to it, seemed to establish between them a real comradeship. He wondered what Raridan would say, and he resolved that he would not tell him of the hasty termination of his golfing; probably Miss Porter would prefer not to have the incident mentioned. He even thought that he would not tell Raridan that she had driven him to town. It was not for him to interpose between Warry Raridan, a man who had brought him

the sweetest friendship he had ever known, and the girl whom fate had clearly appointed Warry to marry.

As they turned into the main highway leading townward, a trap came rapidly toward them.

"Miss Margrave's trap," said Evelyn, as they espied it.

The figures were not yet distinguishable, though Mabel's belongings were always unmistakable.

"Then that must be one of 'The Men'?"

John was angry at himself the moment he had spoken, for as the trap came nearer there was no doubt of the identity of Mabel's companion. It was Warry. Evelyn bowed and smiled as they passed. Mabel gave the quick nod that she was introducing in Clarkson; Saxton and Raridan lifted their hats.

"Miss Margrave has a lot of style; don't you think so, Mr. Saxton?"

"Apparently, yes; but I don't know her, you know;" and he wondered.

Warry Raridan's days were not all lucky. He had been keeping his office with great fidelity of late. He had even found a client or two; and he had determined to rebuke his critics by giving proof of his possession of those staying qualities which they were always denying him. He had been hard at work in his office this afternoon, when a note came to him from Mabel, who begged that he would drive with her to the Country Club. He had already thought of telephoning to Evelyn to ask her if she would not go with him, but had dropped the idea when he remembered his new resolutions; it was for Evelyn that he was at work now. But Mabel was a friendly soul, and perfectly harmless.

It certainly looked very pleasant outside; the next citation in the authorities he was consulting,—Sweetbriar *vs.* O'Neill, 84 N. Y., 26,—would lead him over to the law library, which was a gloomy hole with wretched ventilation. So he had given himself a vacation, with the best grace and excuse in the world.

CHAPTER XVII

WARRY'S REPENTANCE

Saxton dined alone at the Clarkson Club, as he usually did, and went afterward to his office, which he still maintained in the Clarkson National Building. He had been studying the report of an engineering expert on a Colorado irrigation scheme and he was trying to master and correct its weaknesses. As he hung over the blue-prints and the pages of figures that lay before him, the flashing red wheels of Mabel Margrave's trap kept interfering; he wished Warry had not turned up just as he had. He thought he understood why his friend had been so occupied in his office of late; but whether Warry and Evelyn Porter were engaged or not, Warry ought to find better use for his talents than in amusing Mabel Margrave. John lighted his pipe to help with the blue-prints, and while he drew it into cozy accord with himself, the elevator outside discharged a passenger; he heard the click of the wire door as the cage receded, followed by Raridan's quick step in the hall, and Warry broke in on him.

"Well, you're the limit! I'd like to know what you mean by roosting up here and not staying in your room where a white man can find you." He stood with his hands thrust into the pockets of his top-coat, and

glared at Saxton, who lay back in his chair and bit his pipe. "I wish by all the gods I could rattle you once and shake you out of your damned Harvard aplomb!" Raridan did not usually invoke the gods, and he rarely damned anything or anybody.

"That's a very pretty coat you have on, Mr. Raridan. It must be nice to be a plutocrat and wear clothes like that."

"The beastly thing doesn't fit," growled Raridan, throwing himself into a chair. "I don't fit, and my clothes don't fit, and—"

"And you're having a fit. You'd better see a nerve specialist." Warry was pounding a cigarette on the back of his case.

"I say, Saxton," he said calmly.

"Well! Has Vesuvius subsided?" Saxton sat up in his chair and watched Raridan breaking matches wastefully in a nervous effort to strike a light.

"John Saxton, what a beastly ass I am! What a merry-go-round of a fool I make of myself!" Warry blew a cloud of smoke into the air.

"Yes," said John, pulling away at his pipe.

"As I'm a living man, I had no more intention of driving with that girl than I had of going up in a balloon and walking back. You know I never knew her well; I don't want to know her, for that matter; not on your life!"

"Is this a guessing contest? I suppose I'm the goat. Well, you didn't care for Miss Margrave's society; is that what you're driving at? She shan't hear this from me; I'm as safe as a tomb. Moreover, I don't enjoy her acquaintance. Go ahead now, full speed."

"And it was just my infernal hard luck that I got caught this afternoon," continued Warry, ignoring him. "Sometimes it seems to me that I'm predestined and foreordained to do fool things. I've been working like blue blazes on that washerwoman's suit against the Transcontinental,—running their switch through her back yard,—and I had put away all kinds of temptation and was feeling particularly virtuous; but here came the Margrave nigger with that girl's note, and I went up the street in long jumps to meet her, and let her drive me all over town and all over the country, and order me a highball on the Country Club porch, and generally make an ass of me. I wish you'd do something to me; hit me with a club, or throw me down the elevator, or do something equally brutal and coarse that would jar a little of the folly out of me. Why," he continued, with utter self-contempt, through which his humor glimmered, "I ought to have turned down Mabel's invitation as soon as I saw the monogram on her note paper. Three colors, and letters as big as your hand! My instinctive good taste falters, old man; it needs restoring and chastening."

"I quite agree with you, sir. But it's more gallant to abuse yourself than Miss Margrave's stationery—that is, if I am correctly gathering up the crumbs of your thought. I believe you had reached the highball incident in your recital. Was it rye or Scotch? This is the day of realism, and if I'm to give you counsel, or sympathy, or whatever it is you want, I must know all the petty details."

"Don't be foolish," said Raridan, staring abstractedly; then he bent his eyes sharply on Saxton.

"See here, John," he said quietly, folding his arms. He had never before called Saxton by his first name; and the change marked a further advance of intimacy.

"Yes."

"You know I'm a good deal of a fool and all that sort of thing—"

"Chuck that and go ahead."

"But she means a whole lot to me. You know whom I mean." Saxton knew he did not mean Mabel Margrave. "You know," Raridan went on, "we were kids together up there on those hills. We both had our dancing lessons at her house, and did such stunts as that together."

"Yes," said Saxton.

"I want to work and show that I'm some good. I want to make myself worthy of her." He got up and walked the floor, while Saxton sat and watched him.

"I can't talk about it; you understand what I want to do. It has seemed to me lately that I have more to overcome than I can ever manage. I made a lot of fuss about that Knights of Midas rot. I ought to have helped her about that; it was hard for her, but I was too big a fool to know it, and I made myself ridiculous lecturing her. I forgot that she'd grown up, and I didn't know she felt as she did about it. I acted as if I thought she was crazy to pose in that fool show, when I might have known better. It was downright low of me." He stood at the window playing with the cord of the shade and looking out over the town. Saxton walked to the window and stood by him, saying nothing; and after a moment he put his hand on Raridan's shoulder and turned him round and

grasped Warry's slender fingers in his broad, strong hand.

"I understand how it is, old man. It isn't so bad as you think it is, I'm sure. It will all come out right, and while we're making confessions I want to make one too. I feel rather foolish doing it—as if I were in the game—" and he smiled in the way he had, which brought his humility and patience and desire to be on good terms with the world into his face,—"but I want you to know about this afternoon—that—that just happened—my being with her. You see, I didn't know she was there, and she had—I guess she had broken her driver or something, and quit, and I was coming in and she picked me up, and I'm sorry, and—"

Raridan wheeled on him as if he had just caught the drift of his talk.

"Oh, come off! You howling idiot! Don't you talk that way to me again. Get your hat now and let's get out of this."

"I'm glad you're feeling better," said Saxton, and laughed with real relief.

John turned out the light, and while they waited for the elevator to come up for them Warry jingled the coins and keys in his pockets before he blurted:

"I say, John, I'm an underbred, low person, and am not worthy to be called thy friend, and you may hate me all you like, but one thing I'd like to know. Did she say anything about me when you passed us this afternoon—make any comment or anything? You know I despise myself for asking, but—"

Saxton laughed quietly.

"Yes, she did; but I don't know that I ought to tell you. It was really encouraging."

"Well, hurry up."

"She said, 'Miss Margrave has a lot of style; don't you think so?'"

"Is that all?" demanded Raridan, stepping into the car.

"That's all. It wasn't very much; but it was the way she said it; and as she said it she brushed a fly from the horse with the whip, and she did it very carefully."

In the corridor below they met Wheaton coming out of the side door of the bank. He had been at work, he said. Raridan asked him to go with them to the club for a game of billiards, but he pleaded weariness and said he was going to bed.

The three men walked up Varney Street together. Those spirits that order our lives for us must have viewed them with interest as they tramped through the street. They were men of widely different antecedents and qualities. Circumstances, in themselves natural and harmless, had brought them together. The lives of all three were to be influenced by the weakness of one, and one woman's life was to be profoundly affected by contact with all of them. It is not ordained for us to know whether those we touch hands with, and even break bread with, from day to day, are to bring us good or evil. The electric light reveals nothing in the sibyl's book which was not disclosed of old to those who pondered the mysteries by starlight and rushlight.

Wheaton left them at the club door and went on to

The Bachelors', which was only a step farther up the street.

"How do you like Wheaton by this time?" asked Raridan, as they entered the club.

"I hardly know how to answer that," Saxton answered. "He's treated me well enough. It seems to me I'm always trying to find some reason for not liking him, but I can't put my hand on anything tangible."

"That's the way I feel," said Raridan, hanging up his coat in the billiard room. "He's a rigid devil, some way. There's no let-go in him. I guess the law allows us to dislike some people just on general principles, and Jim likes himself so well that you and I don't matter. It's your shot."

CHAPTER XVIII

FATHER AND DAUGHTER

The winds of January had no better luck in shaking down the leaves of the scrub oaks on the Porter hillside than their predecessors of November and December. The snows came and went on the dull slopes, and the canna beds were little blots of ruin in the gray stubble. The house was a place of light and life once more, for Evelyn had obeyed her father's wish rather than her own inclination in opening its doors for frequent teas and dinners and once for a large ball. Many people had entertained for her; she had never been introduced formally, but her mother's friends made up for this omission; she went out a great deal, and enjoyed it. Many young men climbed the hill to see her, and many went to the theater or to dances with her at least once. The number who came to call diminished by Christmas; but those who still came, and were identified as frequenters of the house, came oftener.

Warry Raridan had raged at the mob, as he called it, which he seemed always to find installed in the Porter drawing-room; but he raged inwardly these days, save as he went explosively to Saxton for comfort; he had stopped raging at Evelyn. He was at work more steadily than he had ever been before, and wished the credit

for it which people denied him, to his secret disgust. He had idled too long, or he had too often before given fitful allegiance to labor. Young women and old, who expected him to pass tea for them in the afternoons, refused to believe that he had experienced a change of heart. Those who had bragged of him abroad, and who now lured the eternal visiting girl to town to behold him, were chagrined to find that he was difficult to produce, and mollified their guests by declaring that Warry was getting more fickle and uncertain as he grew older, or took vengeance by encouraging the rumor that he and Evelyn Porter were engaged.

Wheaton called at the Porters' often, but he did not go now with Warry Raridan; he even took some pains to go when Raridan did not. He knew just how much time to allow himself between The Bachelors' and the Porter door bell in order to reach the drawing-room at five minutes past eight. He was now considered one of the men that went out a good deal in Clarkson; he was invited to many houses, and began to wonder that social enjoyment was so easy. It seemed long ago that he had been a leading figure in the ball of the Knights of Midas. Looking back at that incident he was sensible of its poverty and tawdriness; he had sacrificed himself for the public good, and the community shared in the joke of it.

Porter had an amiable way of darting out of the library in the evenings when he and Evelyn were both at home, to see who came in; not that he was abnormally curious as to who rang the door bell, though he enjoyed occasionally a colloquy with a tramp; but he

was always on the lookout for telegrams, of which he received a great many at home, and he declared in his chaffing note of complaint that the people in the house were forever hiding them from him. He sometimes brought home bundles of papers and spent whole evenings digesting them and making computations. Without realizing that Wheaton was in his house pretty often, he was glad to know that his cashier came. When he found that Wheaton was in the drawing-room he usually went over to talk to him in the interim before Evelyn came down. Sometimes a bit of news in the evening paper gave him a text.

"I see that they've had a shaking up over at St. Joe. Well, Wigglesworth never was any good. They ought to have had more sense than to get caught by him. Well, sir, you remember he was offering his paper up here. We could have had a barrel of it; but when a man of his credit peddles his paper away from home, it's a good thing to let alone. When they figure up Wigglesworth's liabilities they will find that he has paper scattered all over the Missouri Valley, and I'll bet the Second's stuck. The last time I saw Wigglesworth he was up at the club one day with Buskirk. He'd been in to see me the day before. I guessed then that he was looking for help which they didn't think he was worth at home." And then, with a chuckle: "Our people," meaning his directors, "think sometimes we're too conservative, and I reckon I do lose a lot of business for them that other fellows would take and get out of all right; but I guess we make more in the long run by being careful. Banking ain't exactly

stove polish or vitalized barley, to put up in pretty packages and advertise on the billboards."

Wheaton was honestly sympathetic and responsive along these lines. He admired Porter, although he often felt that the president made mistakes; yet he, too, believed in conservatism; it was a matter of temperament rather than principle. This mingling of social and business elements pleased and flattered Wheaton. He felt that his position in the Porter bank gave him a double footing in the Porter house. Porter usually ignored Evelyn's presence while he finished whatever he was saying. Then he would go back to his chair in the library, where he could hear the voices across the hall; but he never remained after he had concluded his own talk with Wheaton.

Sometimes, however, when there were other men in the house, Porter would come and stand in the door and regard them good-humoredly, and nod to them amiably, usually with his cigar in his mouth and the evening newspaper in his hand. When there was a good deal of laughing he would go over and gaze upon them questioningly and quiz them; but they usually felt the restraint of his presence. If they repeated to him some story which had prompted their mirth, he was wont to rebuke them with affected seriousness, or he would tell them a story of his own. He expected Evelyn to receive a great deal of attention. He liked to know who her callers were and where she herself visited, and it pleased him that she had called on all her mother's old friends, whether they had been to see her or not. He had a sense of the dignities and proprieties of life, and he felt his own prestige as a founder of the town; it would

have been a source of grief to him if Evelyn had not taken a leading place among its young people.

The theater was the one diversion that appealed to him, and he liked to take Evelyn with him, and wanted her to sit in a box so that he might show her off to better advantage. He could not understand why she preferred seats in the orchestra; Timothy Margrave and his daughter always sat in a box, and young men were forever running in to talk to Mabel between the acts. Porter thought that this showed a special deference to the Margrave girl, as he called her, and for her father too, by implication, and he resented anything that looked like a slight upon Evelyn. He was afraid that she did not entertain enough, and since the girls who visited them in the fall had left, he had been insisting that she must have others come to see her. He had made her tell him about all the girls she had known in college; his curiosity in such directions was almost insatiable. He always demanded to know what their fathers did for a livelihood, and he had been surprised to find that so many of Evelyn's classmates had been daughters of inconspicuous families, and that the young women were in many cases fitting themselves to teach. He had pretty thoroughly catalogued all of Evelyn's college friends, and he suggested about once a week that she have some of them out.

Sometimes, after Evelyn's callers had gone, she and her father sat and talked in the library.

"I don't see what you young people can find to say so much about," he would say; or: "What was Warry gabbling about so long?"

She always told him what had been talked about,

with a careful frankness, lest he might imagine that the visits of Wheaton or Warry, or any one else, had a special intention. She crossed over to the library one night after several callers had left, and found her father more absorbed than usual in a mass of papers which lay on the large table before him. He put down his glasses and lay back in his chair wearily.

"Well, girl, is it time to go to bed? Sit down there and tell me the news."

"There isn't anything worth telling; you know there isn't much information in the average caller." He yawned and rubbed his eyes and paid no attention to her answer. He had asked a few days before whether she cared to go to Chicago to hear the opera, and she had said that she would go if he would; and he now wished to talk this out with her.

"The Whipples are going over to Chicago for the opera," he ventured.

"But you're not getting ready to back out! You ought to be ashamed of yourself." She rose and went toward him menacingly, and he put up his hands as if to ward off her attack.

"But you can have just as much fun with the general as you could with me."

"No, I can't; and for another thing you need a rest. You never go away except on business; the fact is, you never get business out of your mind. Now, let me gather up these things for you." She reached for the array of balance sheets on his table, and he threw his arms over them protectingly.

"Please go away! I've spent all evening straight-

ening these things out." She retreated to her chair, and he began rolling up his papers.

"You'd better go with the Whipples, and Mrs. Whipple will help you do your shopping. It doesn't seem to me that you have many clothes. You'd better get some more."

"You can't buy me off that way, father. Either you go or I don't." He turned toward her again when he had rolled his papers into a packet and fixed a rubber band around them. She knew, as she usually did after such approaches, that he wanted to say something in particular.

"You mustn't settle down too soon. You can't always be young, and you can easily get into a rut here."

"Yes, but I haven't had time yet; I've hardly got settled. I want to get acquainted at home before I go away. I'm afraid they still look on me as a pilgrim and a stranger here."

"But they're all nice to you, ain't they?" he demanded sharply.

"They are certainly as kind as can be," she answered. "I haven't a single complaint. I'm having just the time I wanted to have when I came home."

"I don't want to lose you too soon, girl." It was half a question. She wondered whether this could be what he had been leading up to.

"And I don't want you to lose me at all! I didn't come home after all these years to have you lose me."

"Oh, I don't mean right away," he said. "But sometime—sometime you will have to go, I suppose."

"I'm certainly not thinking of it." She was laughing and trying to break his mood; but he was very

serious, and took a cigar from his pocket and put it in his mouth.

"You'll have to go sometime; and when you do, I want the right kind of a man to have you."

"So do I, father."

"You are old enough to understand that a girl in your position is likely to be sought by men who may—who may—well, who may be swayed somewhat by worldly considerations."

"Isn't that a trifle hard on me? I hoped I was a little more attractive than that, father."

"You know what I mean," he went on. "I guess we can tell that sort when they come around. I've had an idea that you might choose to marry away from here; you've been away a good deal; you must have met a good many young men, brothers of your friends—"

"Yes, I met them, father, and that was all there was to it."

"I shouldn't like you to marry away from here. I've been afraid you wouldn't like our old town. I guess we fellows that started it like it better than anybody else does; but I can see how you might not care so much for it." He waited, and she knew that he wanted her to disavow any such feeling.

"Why, I've never had any idea of wanting to live anywhere else! I don't believe I'd be happy away from here. It's home, and it always will be home. I hope we can stay and keep the old house here—"

She sat forward with her arms on the curved sides of the chair. He did not heed what she said. Older people have this way with youth when they are intent

on the impression they wish to make and count upon acquiescence.

"I don't want you to sacrifice yourself for me out of any sense of duty; the time will come when it will be all right for you to go, and when it comes I want you to go to a man who's decent and square—" He paused as if trying to think of desirable attributes. "I don't care whether he's got much or not, but I like young men who know how to work for a living and who've got a little common sense. I guess we don't need any dukes or counts in our family; we've all been honest and decent as far as I know, and I reckon Americans are good enough for us. I don't know that what I've got would support one of those French counts more than a week or two." His eyes brightened as they met hers. The idea of a titled son-in-law amused him, and Evelyn laughed out merrily. She did not altogether like the turn of the talk, but she was curious to know what he was driving at.

"You understand I don't want to appear to dictate," he went on magnanimously. "I don't believe in that. Nobody knows as well as a girl whom she wants to marry. Sometimes girls make pretty bad breaks; but I guess most marriages are happy. Men are not all good, and there are some mighty foolish women, besides the downright wicked ones. I guess our young men in Clarkson are as good as there are anywhere. Most of them have to work, and that's good for them. I guess I appreciate family and that kind of thing as well as the next man, but it ain't everything." He was speaking slowly, and when he made a long pause here, Evelyn rose and went over to the open grate and poked in the

ashes for the few remaining coals. He watched her as she stooped, noting, half consciously, the fine line of her profile, the ripple of light in her hair, the girlishness of her slim figure.

"No use of fooling with that fire," he said. She knew that he wished to say more, and she put the poker in its brass rack and rose and stood by the mantel.

"At my age, life gets more uncertain every day; I seem to be pretty sound, but I was sixty-four my last birthday, and if I'd been in the army they would have kicked me out of my job; but so long as I work for myself I suppose I'll hang on until I can't stand up in the harness any more."

"But that's a mistake, father," she put in. "Why shouldn't you take some rest now? If there's no other way, why not close out your interest in the bank and take things easier? You ought to travel; you've never been out of the country, and there are lots of things in Europe that you'd enjoy; the rest and change would do you a world of good. Can't we go this summer, and take Grant? It would be nice for us all to go together."

He shook his head with the deprecating air which men of Porter's type have for such suggestions. "It would be mighty nice, but I can't do it. Here's Thompson away, and no telling when he'll be back, and I have other things besides the bank to look after; more than you know about." She knew only vaguely what his interests were, for he never mentioned them to her; he believed that women are incapable of comprehending such things; and his natural secretiveness was always on guard. He even entertained a kind of

superstition that if he told of anything he was planning he jeopardized his chances of success.

"No, I guess there ain't going to be any Europe for me just now. But I'd be glad to have you and Grant go." He had been side-tracked in his talk, and chewed his cigar while trying to find the way back to the main line. Then he broke out irrelevantly:

"Warry doesn't seem to settle down. We used to think Warry had great things in him, but they're mighty slow coming out."

"Well, he's still young," said Evelyn. "It takes a young man a long time to get a start these days in the professions." Her father looked at her keenly.

"I'm afraid it isn't lack of opportunity with Warry. If he'd ever get after anything in real earnest he could make it go; but he seems to fool away his time." He said this as if he expected Evelyn to continue her defense, but she said merely:

"It's too bad if he's doing that when he has ability." She walked back to her chair and sat down. She knew that Warry was really at work, but she was afraid to show any particular knowledge of him.

"It's one of the queer things to me that young fellows who have every chance don't seem to get on as well as others who haven't any backing. Now, all Warry had to do was to stay in his office and attend to business—or that's all he needed to do three or four years ago, when he set up to practise; but now everybody's given him up. A man who doesn't want an opportunity in this world doesn't have to kick it very hard to get rid of it. Other fellows, who never had any chance, are watching for the luckier ones to slip

back. There are never any lonesome places on the ladder. Now, there's Wheaton—" He again examined Evelyn's face in one of those tranquil stares with which he made his most minute scrutiny of people. "Wheaton ain't a showy fellow like Warry, but he's one of the sort that make their way because they keep an eye open to the main chance. Jim came into the bank as a messenger, and I guess he's had pretty much every job we've got, and he's done them well." He had lighted his cigar and was talking volubly. "When Thompson played out and had to go away, we looked around for somebody on the inside who knew the run of our business to put in there to help me. None of the directors wanted to come in, and so we pulled Jim out of the paying teller's cage, and he's just about saved my back. Now, Jim's not so smart, but he's steady and safe, and that's what counts in business."

He leaned back in his chair and wobbled the cigar in his mouth.

"These young Napoleons of finance are forever chasing off to Canada with other folks' money; they're too brilliant. I tell 'em down town that it ain't genius we want in business, it's just ordinary, plain, every-day talent for getting down early and staying at your job. That's what I say. There was Smith over at the Drovers' National; he was a clear case of genius. They thought over there that he was making business by chasing around the country attending banquets and speaking at bankers' conventions. I guess Smith's essays were financially sound too, for Smith knew finance, scientific finance, like a college professor, and used to come to the clearing-house meet-

ings and talk to beat the band about what Bagehot said and how the Bank of England did; but all the time he was spending his Sundays over in Kansas City, drumming up banking business by playing poker with the gentlemen he expected to get for his customers. He's running a laundry now on the wrong side of the Canadian border. Over at the Drovers' they ain't so terribly scientific now, and their cashier don't have an expense fund to carry him around the country making connections. Making connections!" he repeated, and chuckled. He had the conceit of his own wisdom, and while he was always generous in his dealings with his rivals, and had several times helped them out of difficulties, he rejoiced in their errors and congratulated himself on his foresight and caution.

"You oughtn't to laugh at the downfall of other people," said Evelyn; "it's wicked of you." But she was laughing herself at his enjoyment of his own joke, and was proud of the qualities which she knew had contributed to his success. He felt baffled that he had not fully concluded all he had intended to say about Wheaton and his merits, but he did not see his way back to the subject, and he rose yawning.

"I guess it's time to go to bed," he said, and he went about turning off the electric lights by the buttons in the hall. Evelyn went upstairs ahead of him, and kissed him good night at his door.

"You'd better go to the opera with the Whipples," he called to her over his shoulder, as he waited for her to reach her own door before turning off the upper hall light.

"Not a bit of it," she answered through the dark.

The novel with which Evelyn tried to read herself to sleep that night did not hold her attention, and after her memory had teased her into impatience, she threw the book down and for a long time lay thinking. She knew her father so well that she had no doubt of the current of his thought and his wish to praise James Wheaton and disparage Warry Raridan, and it troubled her; not because she herself had any well-defined preferences as between them or in their favor as against all other men she knew; but it seemed to her that her father had disclosed his own feeling rather unnecessarily and pointedly.

Suddenly, as she lay thinking and staring at the walls, life took on new and serious aspects, and she did not want it to be so. Because she had been so much away from home the provincial idea that every man that calls on a girl, or takes her to a theater in our free, unchaperoned way, is a serious suitor had not impressed her. She had expected to come home and enjoy herself indefinitely, and had idealized a situation in which she should be the stay of her father through his old age, and the chum and guide of her brother, in whom the repetition of her mother's characteristics strongly appealed to her. There had been little trouble or grief in her life, and now for the first time she saw uncertainties ahead where a few hours before everything had seemed simple and clear. She had felt no offense when her father spoke slightingly of Warry Raridan; she knew that her father really liked him, as every one did, and she would not have hesitated to say that she admired him greatly, even in his possession of those traits which betrayed the

weaknesses of his character. She certainly had no thought of him save as a whimsical and amusing friend, a playmate who had never grown up.

It was true that he had made love to her, or had tried to; but she had no faith in his sincerity. She had first felt amused, and then a little sorry, when he had gone to work so earnestly. He took the trouble to remind her frequently that it was all for her, and she laughed at him and at the love-making which he was always attempting and which she always thwarted. Saxton did not come often to the house, but when he came he exercised his ingenuity to bring Raridan into the talk in the rare times that they were alone together. She knew why Saxton praised her friend to her, and it increased her liking for him. It is curious how a woman's pity goes out to a man; any suggestion of misfortune makes an excuse for her to clothe him with her compassion. It is as though Nature, in denying gifts or inflicting punishment, hastened to throw in compensations. Saxton asked so little, and beamed so radiantly when given so little; he received kindnesses so shyly, as if, of course, they could not be meant for him, but it was all right anyway, and he would move on just as soon as the other fellow came.

As for Wheaton, he was certainly not frivolous, and her father's respect for him and dependence on him had communicated itself to her. He was so much older than she; and at twenty-two, thirty-five savors of antiquity; but he was steady, and steadiness was a trait that she respected. He was terribly formal, but he was kind and thoughtful; he was even handsome, or at least so every one said.

She lay dreaming until the clock on the mantel chimed midnight, when she reached for the novel that had fallen on the coverlet, to put it on the stand beside her bed. A card which she had been using as a mark fell from the book; she picked it up and turned it over to see whose it was. It was John Saxton's.

"Father didn't say anything about him," she said aloud. She thrust the card back into the book and reached up and snapped out the light.

CHAPTER XIX

A FORECAST AT THE WHIPPLES'

There was a cup of tea at the Whipples' for any one that dropped in at five o'clock. The general kept a syphon in the icebox, and his wife's tea, which he loathed, gave him his excuse. He was fond of saying that an exacting government made it impossible for an army officer to get acquainted with his wife until after his retirement, and then, he declared, there was nothing to discuss but the opportunities in life which they had missed. They talked a great deal to each other about their neighbors, and about their friends in the army whose lives they were able to follow through the daily list of transfers in the newspapers, and the ampler current history of the military establishment in the Army and Navy Journal. Few men in Clarkson had time for the general. He found the club an unsocial place, and he preferred his own battered copies of "Pendennis" and "Henry Esmond" to anything in the club library. Occasionally when Mrs. Whipple was out for luncheon he went to the club for midday sustenance, but the other men who hurried through their forty cents' worth of table d'hôte, talked of matters that were as alien to him as marine law. It would have suited the general much better to live in Washington, where others with equally

little to do assembled in force; but his wife would not hear to it. She would not have her husband, she said, becoming a professional pall bearer, and this was the occupation of retired officers of the army and navy at the capital. He submitted to her superior authority, as he always did, and settled in Clarkson, where one could get much more for one's money than in Washington.

The general usually remained in the Indian room at the tea hour, particularly if he liked the talk of the women who appeared, or if they were good to look at; otherwise he carried his syphon to the dining-room, where there was a bottle of the same brand of rye whisky which he kept back of "The Life of Peter the Great" in a book case in the Indian room. He and Mrs. Whipple had gone to the opera without Evelyn, and the general was now settling himself to his domestic routine. He had dodged a woman whose prattle vexed him and whose call had been prolonged, and having heard the door close upon her, he was returning to his own preserve with the intention of getting some hot water from Mrs. Whipple's tea kettle for use in compounding a punch, when Bishop Delafield came in, bringing a great draft of cold air with his huge figure. The bishop was a friend of many years' standing. His sonorous voice filled the room and aided the fire in promoting cheeriness. Mrs. Whipple brewed her tea, and the general made his punch,—for two—for it was certainly snowing somewhere in the Diocese of Clarkson, the bishop said, and he had established his joke with the general that he might allow himself spirits in bad weather, as a preventive of the rheumatism which he never had. The three made a

cozy picture as they grouped themselves about the bright hearth. They were discussing the marriage of an old officer whom they all knew, a man of Whipple's own age, who had just married a woman much his junior.

"It's easy for us all to philosophize adversely about such things," said the general, sitting up straight in his camp chair. "I have a good deal of sympathy with Bixby. He was lonely and his children were all married and scattered to the four winds. I suppose there's nothing worse than loneliness."

His wife frowned at him; their friend's long sorrow and his fidelity to his memories appealed to all the romance in her.

"It's very different," Mrs. Whipple made haste to say, "where there are children at home. Now there's Mr. Porter; he has Evelyn and Grant."

"But that probably won't last long," said the bishop. "Girls have a way of leaving home."

"Well, there's nothing imminent?" asked Mrs. Whipple, anxiously.

"Oh, no! And girls that have been educated as she has been are likely to choose warily, aren't they?"

"Nothing in it," said the general, stirring his glass. "They all go when they get ready, without notice. Education doesn't change that."

"It strikes me that there aren't many eligible men here," said the bishop. "To be explicit, just whom shall a girl like Evelyn Porter marry?" He did not intend this for the general, who was refilling the glasses, but the general refused to be ignored.

"It's my observation," he began, with an air of having much to impart, if they would only let him alone, "that

in every town the size of this there are people who are predestined to marry. They fight it as hard as they can, and dodge their destinies wherever possible; but it's a pretty sure thing that ultimately they'll hit it off."

"That sounds like a sort of social presbyterianism to me," said the bishop dryly, "and therefore heretical." He was really interested in knowing what Mrs. Whipple knew or felt on this subject as it affected Evelyn Porter. "Now you've been better trained, Mrs. Whipple," he said.

"Well, so far as Evelyn's concerned," she answered, knowing that this was what the bishop wanted, "I'm not worrying about her. She's a sensible girl and will take care of herself. I'm not half so much afraid of destiny as of propinquity. We all know how the bachelor captain goes down before the sister, or the in-law of some kind, of the colonel of the regiment."

"That's not propinquity," said the general; "that's ordinary Christian charity on the captain's part."

"Suppose," said the bishop slowly, "the commandant so to speak, is really a banker, with a trusted officer, a kind of adjutant at his elbow; and also a handsome daughter. Assume such a hypothetical case, and what are you going to do about it?" He drained his glass and put it down carefully.

"This looks like the appeal direct," answered Mrs. Whipple, laughing and looking at her husband, who was meditating another punch and feeling for the scent blindly.

"I don't know about that Mr. Wheaton," said Mrs. Whipple, meeting the issue squarely. "He doesn't seem amusing to me, but then—I don't know him!"

"Must one be amusing?" asked the bishop.

"Oh, I mean more than that!" exclaimed Mrs. Whipple. "Don't we always mean intelligent when we say amusing?"

"Definitions certainly change. We are growing terribly exacting these days. But," he added, serious again, "Wheaton's a success; he's pointed to as one of Clarkson's rising men; one of the really self-made."

"Yes; I fancy he never knew Evelyn before the Knights of Midas ball;" and she sighed, wondering whether she was culpable. She knew that the bishop meant more than he had said and that this was a kind of warning to her. She felt guilty, remembering the ball, and the appeal Evelyn had made to her beforehand. A woman that has enjoyed a long career of fancied infallibility experiences sorrow when she suddenly questions the wisdom of her own judgments.

"What's the matter with Warry Raridan?" demanded the general. "He's got to marry somebody some day; he and Evelyn would make a very proper match. Wouldn't they?" he pleaded, when his wife and their visitor did not respond promptly.

"Oh, Warry's well enough," the bishop answered. "But Warry's an uncertain quantity. He's a fine, clean fellow, with all kinds of possibilities; but—they're possibilities!"

"Warry's certainly bright enough," said General Whipple.

"His sense of humor is a trifle too keen for every-day use," said the bishop.

"What's he been up to now?" asked the general.

The bishop laughed quietly to himself.

"It was this way. You know Warry's interest in church matters is abnormal. The boy really knows a lot of theology for one who has never studied it. He has, he says, a neat taste in bishops, whatever that means—" the bishop chuckled softly,—"and whenever one of my brethren visits me, Warry always lays himself out to give us what he calls a warm little time. A few days ago I had a letter from the Patriarch of Alexandria, whom I don't know, in which he set forth that Doctor Warrick Raridan, of my diocese, had written him proposing a great reunion of Christendom, based on the Coptic rite. As neither the Roman, the Greek, nor the Anglican Church afforded a common meeting ground, owing to many difficulties, the American gentleman had suggested that all might meet at Alexandria. The Patriarch was delighted. Doctor Raridan had suggested me as a reference, hence the venerable prelate wished to know my opinion of the extent of the movement. I suppose Warry did that as a joke on me, or to get the Patriarch's autograph, I don't know which. I haven't seen Warry since, but I'm disposed to dust his jacket for him in a fatherly way when I get hold of him. I don't know why the Patriarch should call Warry 'Doctor.' He probably assumed that a man who could write as good a letter as Warry is capable of must be a person of distinction."

"Warry's a gentleman, at any rate," said Mrs. Whipple.

"Which Wheaton isn't; is that the idea?" demanded the general; and then added: "This Wheaton strikes me as being a wooden kind of fellow. He acts as if he hadn't been used to things."

"Sh-h! be careful! That's no test of worth on the banks of the Missouri," said his wife warningly.

"Do you mean to say that Evelyn Porter's chances have been fully covered?" demanded the general. He liked gossip and hoped the subject would prove more fruitful.

"There's Mr. Saxton," said his wife. "He seems altogether possible."

"He's the new man, isn't he? He always lifts his hat to me in the street; an unusual attention in this ill-mannered age."

"Does *he* act as if he had been used to things?" asked the bishop. He was still seriously interested in canvassing Evelyn's case.

"He's very nice," Mrs. Whipple said; "but he's not desperately exciting, as the girls say."

"But then!" The bishop lifted his hands with a despairing gesture, "must young men be amusing or exciting in these days? Is he honest? Does he lead a clean life? Has he, as the saying is, an outlook on life?"

"He isn't seeing much of Evelyn, I think," said Mrs. Whipple. "And he's a great friend of Warry's. They may offset each other."

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed the general, "I don't see any use in worrying over Evelyn Porter and her suitors. She'll have plenty of them. And when she gets good and ready she'll up and marry one of them."

"No girl with at least three possibilities in one town, to say nothing of dozens she may have elsewhere, need be a subject of commiseration," said Mrs. Whipple.

"But," began the bishop slowly, "it might be better to eliminate at least one."

"Not Warry!" threw in Mrs. Whipple.

"Not Saxton," added the general. "I like him; he's polite and thoughtful about us old folks."

The bishop had risen, knowing that the climax of a conversation is best given standing.

"I shouldn't cut out either of them," he said, smiling.

CHAPTER XX

ORCHARD LANE

After the interim of quiet that Lent always brings in Clarkson, the spring came swiftly. There was a renewal of social activities which ran from dances and teas into outdoor gatherings. Evelyn had enjoyed to the full her experience of home. She had plunged into the frivolities of the town with a zest that was a trifle emphasized through her wish to escape any charge of being pedantic or literary. She was glad that she had gone to college, but she did not wish this fact of her life to be the haunting ghost of her days; and by the end of the winter she felt that she had pretty effectually laid it.

In June Mr. Porter began discussing summer plans with Evelyn. He eliminated himself from them; he could not get away, he said. But there was Grant to be considered. The boy was at school in New Hampshire, and Evelyn protested that it was not wise to subject him to the intense heat of a Clarkson summer. The first hot wave sent Porter to bed with a trifling illness, and his doctor took the opportunity to look him over and tell him that it was imperative for him to rest. Thompson came home from Arizona to spend the summer. He and Wheaton were certainly equal to the care of the

bank, so they urged upon Porter, and he finally yielded. Evelyn found a hotel on the Massachusetts North Shore which sounded well in the circulars, and her father agreed to it. When they reached Orchard Lane he liked it better than he had expected; the hotel was one of those vast caravansaries where all sorts and conditions assemble; and he was reassured by the click of the telegraph instrument and the presence of the long distance telephone booth in the office. He was a cockney of the rankest kind and it dulled the edge of his isolation to know that he was not entirely cut off from the world. Every night he sat down with cipher telegrams, and constructed from Thompson's statistics the day's business in the bank. He received daily from New York the closing quotations on the shares he was interested in, and as he walked the long hotel verandas he effected a transmigration of spirit which put him back in his swivel chair in the Clarkson National.

Evelyn made him drive with her and Grant, and dragged him to the golf course, where she was the star player, and where Grant was learning the game.

A college friend of Evelyn's, in one of the near-by cottages, asked her neighbors to call on the Porters. The fact that the cottagers thus set the mark of their approval upon the Westerners, gave them distinction at the hotel. Several men of Porter's age took him to their quieter porches and found him interesting; they liked his stories, though they hardly excused his ignorance of whist; in their hearts they accused him of poker, of which he was guiltless. Incidentally they got a good deal of information from him touching their Western interests; it was worth while to know a man

that received the crop news ahead of the newspapers. He liked the praise of Evelyn which was constantly reaching him; she was the prettiest girl in the place; her golf was certainly better than any other girl's. When she won a cup in the tournament he waited anxiously to see what the Boston papers said about it, and he surreptitiously mailed the cuttings home to the Clarkson *Gazette*.

In August Warry Raridan appeared suddenly and threw himself into the gaieties of the place for a fortnight. Mr. Porter asked him to sit at their table and marveled at the way Evelyn snubbed him, even to the extent of running away for three days with some friends who had a yacht and who carried her to Newport for a dance. During her absence Warry made all the other girls about the place happy; they were sure that "that Miss Porter" was treating him shabbily and their hearts went out to him. Warry sulked when Evelyn returned and they had an interview between dances at a Saturday night hop.

He sought again for recognition as a lover; she had not praised the efforts he had been making to win her approval by diligence at his office; he took care to call her attention to his changed habits.

"But, Evelyn, I am doing differently. I know that I wasted myself for years so that I'm a kind of joke and everybody laughs about me. But I want to know—I want to feel that I'm doing it for you! Don't you know how that would help me and steady me? Won't you let it be for you?" He came close to her and stood with his arms folded, but she drew away from him with a despairing gesture.

"Oh, Warry," she cried, wearily, "you poor, foolish boy! Don't you know that you must do all things for yourself?"

"Yes," he returned eagerly. "I know that; I understand perfectly; but if you'd only let me feel that you wanted it—"

"I want you to succeed, but you will never do it for any one, if you don't do it for yourself."

He went home by an early train next morning to receive Saxton's consolation and to turn again to his law books. Margrave, on behalf of the Transcontinental, had offered to compromise the case of the poor widow whose clothes lines had been interfered with; but Raridan rejected this tender. He needed something on which to vent his bad spirits, and he gave his thought to devising means of transferring the widow's cause to the federal court. The removal of causes from state to federal courts was, Warry frequently said, one of the best things he did.

CHAPTER XXI

JAMES WHEATON MAKES A COMPUTATION

Porter's vacation was not altogether wasted. As he lounged about and philosophized to the Bostonians on Western business conditions, his restless mind took hold of a new project. It was suggested to him by the inquiries of a Boston banker, who owned a considerable amount of Clarkson Traction bonds and stock which he was anxious to sell. Porter gave a discouraging account of the company, whose history he knew thoroughly. The Traction Company had been organized in the boom days and its stock had been inflated in keeping with the prevailing spirit of the time. It was first equipped with the cable system in deference to the Clarkson hills, but later the company made the introduction of the trolley an excuse for a reorganization of its finances with an even more generous inflation. The panic then descended and wrought a diminution of revenue; the company was unable to make the repairs which constantly became necessary, and the local management fell into the hands of a series of corrupt directorates.

There had been much litigation, and some of the Eastern bondholders had threatened a receivership; but the local stockholders made plausible excuses for the

default of interest when approached amicably, and when menaced grew insolent and promised trouble if an attempt were made to deprive them of power. A secretary and a treasurer under one administration had connived to appropriate a large share of the daily cash receipts, and before they left the office they destroyed or concealed the books and records of the company. The effect of this was to create a mystery as to the distribution of the bonds and the stock. When Porter came home from his summer vacation, the newspapers were demanding that steps be taken to declare the Traction franchise forfeit. But the franchise had been renewed lately and had twenty years to run. This extension had been procured by the element in control, and the foreign bondholders, biding their time, were glad to avail themselves of the political skill of the local officers.

Porter had been casually asked by his Boston friend whether there was any local market for the stock or bonds; and he had answered that there was not; that the holders of shares in Clarkson kept what they had because they could no longer sell to one another and that they were only waiting for the larger outside bondholders and shareholders to assert themselves. Porter had ridden down to Boston with his brother banker and when they parted it was with an understanding that the Bostonian was to collect for Porter the Clarkson Traction securities that were held by New England banks, a considerable amount, as Porter knew; and he went home with a well-formed plan of buying the control of the company. Times were improving and he had faith in Clarkson's future; he did not believe in it so noisily as Timothy Margrave did; but he knew the

resources of the tributary country, and he had, what all successful business men must have, an alert imagination.

It was not necessary for Porter to disclose the fact of his purchases to the officers of the Traction Company, whom he knew to be corrupt and vicious; the transfer of ownership on the company's books made no difference, as the original stock books had been destroyed,—a fact which had become public property through a legal effort to levy on the holdings of a shareholder in the interest of a creditor. Moreover, if he could help it, Porter never told any one about anything he did. He even had several dummies in whose names he frequently held securities and real estate. One of these was Peckham, a clerk in the office of Fenton, Porter's lawyer.

Wheaton had not long been an officer of the bank before he began to be aware that there was considerable mystery about Porter's outside transactions. Porter occasionally perused with much interest several small memorandum books which he kept carefully locked in his desk. The president often wrote letters with his own hand and copied them himself after bank hours, in a private letter-book. Wheaton was naturally curious as to what these outside interests might be. It had piqued him to find that while he was cashier of the bank he was not consulted in its larger transactions; and that of Porter's personal affairs he knew nothing.

One afternoon shortly after Porter's return from the East, Wheaton, who was waiting for some letters to sign, picked up a bundle of checks from the desk of one of the individual bookkeepers. They were Porter's personal

checks which had that day been paid and were now being charged to his private account. Wheaton turned them over mechanically; it was not very long since he had been an individual bookkeeper himself; he had entered innumerable checks bearing Porter's name without giving them a thought. As the slips of paper passed through his fingers, he accounted for them in one way or another and put them back on the desk, face down, as a man always does who has been trained as a bank clerk. The last of them he held and studied. It was a check made payable to Peckham, Fenton's clerk. The amount was $9,999.00,—too large to be accounted for as a payment for services; for Peckham was an elderly failure at the law who ran errands to the courts for Fenton and sometimes took charge of small collection matters for the bank. Wheaton paid the attorney fees for the bank; this check had nothing to do with the bank, he was sure. The check, with its curious combination of figures, puzzled and fascinated him.

A few days later, in the course of business, he asked Porter what disposition he should make of an application for a loan from a country customer. Porter rang for the past correspondence with their client, and threw several letters to Wheaton for his information. Wheaton read them and called the stenographer to dictate the answer which Porter had indicated should be made. He held the client's last letter in his hand, and in concluding turned it over into the wire basket which stood on his desk. As it fell face downwards his eye caught some figures on the back, and he picked it up thinking that they might relate to the letter. The

memorandum was in Porter's large uneven hand and read:

303
33

909
909

9999

The result of the multiplication was identical with the amount of Peckham's check. Again the figures held his attention. Local securities were quoted daily in the newspapers, and he examined the list for that day. There was no quotation of thirty-three on anything; the nearest approach was Clarkson Traction Company at thirty-five. The check which had interested him had been dated three days before, and he looked back to the quotation list for that date. Traction was given at thirty-three. Wheaton was pleased by the discovery; it was a fair assumption that Porter was buying shares of Clarkson Traction; he would hardly be buying foreign securities through Peckham. The stock had advanced two points since it had been purchased, and this, too, was interesting. Clearly, Porter knew what he was about,—he had a reputation for knowing; and if Clarkson Traction was a good thing for the president to pick up quietly, why was it not a good thing for the cashier? He waited a day; Traction went to thirty-six. Then he called after banking hours at the office of a real estate dealer who also dealt in local stocks and bonds on a small scale. He chose this man because he was not a customer of the bank, and had never had any transactions with the bank or with Porter, so far as Wheaton

knew. His name was Burton, and he welcomed Wheaton cordially. He was alone in his office, and after an interchange of courtesies, Wheaton came directly to the point of his errand.

"Some friends of mine in the country own a small amount of Traction stock; they've written me to find out what its prospects are. Of course in the bank we know in a general way about it, but I suppose you handle such things and I want to get good advice for my friends."

"Well, the truth is," said Burton, flattered by this appeal, "the bottom was pretty well gone out of it, but it's sprucing up a little just now. If the charter's knocked out it is only worth so much a pound as old paper; but if the right people get hold of it the newspapers will let up, and there's a big thing in it. How much do your friends own?"

"I don't know exactly," said Wheaton, evenly; "I think not a great deal. Who are buying just now? I notice that it has been advancing for several days. Some one seems to be forcing up the price."

"Nobody in particular, that is, nobody that I know of. I asked Billy Barnes, the secretary, the other day what was going on. He must know who the certificates are made out to; but he winked and gave me the laugh. You know Barnes. He don't cough up very easy; and he looks wise when he doesn't know anything."

"No; Barnes has the reputation of being pretty close-mouthed," replied Wheaton.

"If your friends want to sell, bring in the shares and I'll see what I can do with them," said Burton. "The outsiders are sure to act soon. This spurt right now

may have nothing back of it. The town's full of gossip about the company and it ought to send the price down. Your friend Porter's a smooth one. He was in once, a long time ago, but he knew when to get out all right." Wheaton laughed with Burton at this tribute to Porter's sagacity, but he laughed discreetly. He did not forget that he was a bank officer and dignity was an essential in the business, as he understood it.

Within a few days two more checks from Porter to Peckham passed through the usual channels of the bank. By the simple feat of dividing the amount of each check by the current quotation on Traction, Wheaton was able to follow Porter's purchases. The price had remained pretty steady. Then suddenly it fell to thirty. He wondered what was happening, but the newspapers, which were continuing their war on the company, readily attributed it to a lack of confidence in the franchise. Wheaton met the broker, apparently by chance, but really by intention, in the club one evening, and remarked casually:

"Traction seems to be off a little?"

"Yes; there's something going on there that I can't make out. I imagine that the fellows that were buying got tired of stimulating the market, and have thrown a few bunches back to keep the outsiders guessing."

"Right now might be a good time to get in," suggested Wheaton.

"I should call it a good buy myself. I guess that franchise is all right. Better pick up a little," he said, tentatively.

"To tell the truth," said Wheaton, choosing his words carefully, "those out of town people I spoke to you about

have written me that they'd like a little more, if it can be got at the right figure. You might pick up a hundred shares for me at the current price, if you can."

"How do you want to hold it?"

"Have it made to me," he answered. He had debated whether he should do this, and he had been unable to devise any method of holding the stock without letting his own name appear. Porter would not know; Porter was concealing his own purchases. Wheaton could not see that it made any difference; he was surely entitled to invest his money as he liked, and he raised the sum necessary in this case by the sale of some railroad bonds which he had been holding, and on which he could realize at once by sending them to the bank's correspondent at Chicago. He might have sold them at home; Porter would probably have taken them off his hands; but the president knew that his capital was small, and might have asked how he intended to reinvest the proceeds.

"Of course this is all confidential," said Wheaton.

"Sure," said Burton.

"And when you get it, telephone me and I'll come up and settle," said Wheaton.

A few days later Burton sent for Wheaton to come to his office. One hundred shares had been secured from a ranchman. Wheaton carried the purchase money in currency to Burton's office; he was as shrewd as William Porter, and he did not care to have the clerks in the bank speculating about his checks.

He locked his certificate, when Burton got it for him, in his private box in the vault, and waited the rebound which he firmly expected in the price of the stock. His

sole idea was to make a profit by the purchase. He felt perfectly confident that Porter had bought Traction stock with a definite purpose; he still had no idea who were the principal holders of Traction stock or bonds, and he was afraid to make inquiry. A man who was as secretive as Porter probably had confidential sources of information, and it was not safe to tap Porter's wires. His conscience was easy as to the method by which he had gained his knowledge of Porter's purchases; he certainly meant no harm to Porter.

CHAPTER XXII

AN ANNUAL PASS

Timothy Margrave was, in common phrase, a good railroad man. He had advanced by slow degrees from the incumbency of those lowly manual offices called jobs, to the performance of those nobler functions known as positions. Margrave's elevation to the office of third vice-president and general manager was due to his Pull. This was originally political but later financial; and he now had both kinds of Pulls. There is no greater arrogance among us than that of our railway officials; they are greater tyrants than any that sit in public office. The General Something or Other is a despot, the records of whose life are written in tissue manifold; his ideals are established for him by those of his own order who have been raised to a higher power, which he himself aspires to reach in due season. Margrave had gone as high as he expected to go with the corporation whose destinies he had done so much to promote; all who were below him in the Transcontinental knew that he held their lives in his hands; all his subordinates, down to the boys who carried long manila envelopes marked R. R. B. to and from trains called him IT.

Margrave had resolved that the railroad was getting too much out of him and that he must do more to

promote his own fortunes. The directors were good fellows, and they had certainly treated him well; but it seemed within the pale of legitimate enterprise for him to broaden his interests a trifle without in any wise diminishing his zeal for the Transcontinental. The street railway business was a good business, and Clarkson Traction appealed to Margrave, moreover, on its political side. If he reorganized the company and made himself its president he could greatly fortify and strengthen his Pull. Tim Margrave's Pull was already of consequence and it would be of great use in this new undertaking; moreover, it would naturally be augmented by his control of the little army of Traction employees. He proposed getting some of the Eastern stockholders of the Transcontinental to help him acquire Traction holdings sufficient to get control of the company; and, with Margrave, to decide was to act.

Almost any day, he was told, the Eastern bondholders might pounce down and put a receiver in charge of the company. Margrave did not understand receiverships according to High or Beach or any other legal authority; but according to Margrave they were an excuse for pillage, and it was a regret of his life that no fat receivership had ever fallen to his lot. But he was not going into Traction blindly. He wanted to know who else was interested, that he might avoid complications. William Porter was the only man in Clarkson who could swing Traction without assistance; he must not run afoul of Porter. Margrave was a master of the art of getting information, and he decided, on reflection, that the easiest way to get information about Porter was to coax it out of Wheaton.

He always called Wheaton "Jim," in remembrance of those early days of Wheaton's residence in Clarkson when Wheaton had worked in his office. He had watched Wheaton's rise with interest; he took to himself the credit of being his discoverer. When Wheaton called on his daughter he made no comment; he knew nothing to Wheaton's discredit, and he would no more have thought of criticizing Mabel than of ordering dynamite substituted for coal in the locomotives of his railroad. When he concluded that he needed Wheaton, he began playing for him, just as if the cashier had been a councilman or a member of the legislature or a large shipper or any other fair prey.

He had unconsciously made a good beginning by making Wheaton the King of the Carnival; he now resorted to that most insidious and economical form of bribery known as the annual pass.

One of these pretty bits of pasteboard was at once mailed to Wheaton by the Second Assistant General Something on Margrave's recommendation.

Wheaton accepted the pass as a tribute to his growing prominence in the town. He knew that Porter refused railroad passes on practical grounds, holding that such favors were extended in the hope of reciprocal compliments, and he believed that a banker was better off without them. Wheaton, whose vanity had been touched, could see no harm in them. He had little use for passes as he knew and cared little about traveling, but he had always envied men who carried their "annuals" in little brass-bound books made for the purpose. To be sure it was late in the year and passes were usually sent out in January, but this made the compliment seem

much more direct; the Transcontinental had forgotten him, and had thought it well to rectify the error between seasons. He felt that he must not make too much of the railroad's courtesy; he did not know to which official in particular he was indebted, but he ran into Margrave one evening at the club and decided to thank him.

"How's traffic?" he asked, as Margrave made room for him on the settee where he sat reading the evening paper.

"Fair. Anything new?"

"No; it's the same routine with me pretty much all the time."

"I guess that's right. I shouldn't think there was much fun in banking. You got to keep the public too far away. I like to be up against people myself."

"Banking is hardly a sociable business," said Wheaton.

"No; a good banker's got to have cold feet, as the fellow said."

"But you railroad people are not considered so very warm," said Wheaton. "The fellows who want favors seem to think so. By the way, I'm much obliged to some one for an annual that turned up in my mail the other day. I don't know who sent it to me,—if it's you—"

"Um?" Margrave affected to have been wandering in his thoughts, but this was what he was waiting for. "Oh, I guess that was Wilson. I never fool with the pass business myself; I've got troubles of my own."

"I guess I'll not use it very often," said Wheaton, as if he owed an apology to the road for accepting it.

"Better come out with me in the car sometime and

see the road," Margrave suggested, throwing his newspaper on the table.

"I'd like that very much," said Wheaton.

"Where's Thompson now? Old man's pretty well done up, ain't he?"

"He went back to Arizona. He was here at work all summer. He's afraid of our winters."

"Well, that gives you your chance," said Margrave, affably. "There ain't any young man in town that's got a better chance than you have, Jim."

"I know that," said Wheaton, humbly.

"You don't go in much on the outside, do you? I suppose you don't have much time."

"No; I'm held down pretty close; and in a bank you can't go into everything."

"Well, there's nothing like keeping an eye out. Good things are not so terribly common these days." Margrave got up and walked the floor once or twice, apparently in a musing humor, but he really wished to look into the adjoining room to make sure they were alone.

"I believe," he said, with emphasis on the pronoun, "there's going to be a good thing for some one in Traction stock. Porter ought to let you in on that." Margrave didn't know that Porter was in, but he expected to find out.

"Mr. Porter has a way of keeping things to himself," said Wheaton, cautiously; yet he was flattered by Margrave's friendliness, and anxious to make a favorable impression. Vanity is not, as is usually assumed, a mere incident of character; it is a disease.

"I suppose," said Margrave, "that a man could buy a barrel of that stuff just now at a low figure."

Wheaton could not resist this opportunity.

"What I have, I got at thirty-one," he answered, as if it were the most natural thing in the world for him to have Traction stock. This was not a bank confidence; there was no reason why he should not talk of his own investments if he wished to do so.

Margrave had reseated himself, and lounged on the settee with a confidential air that he had found very effective in the committee rooms at the state capital when it was necessary to deal with a difficult legislator.

"I suppose Porter must have got in lower than that," he said, carelessly. "Billy usually gets in on the ground floor." He chuckled to himself in admiration of the banker's shrewdness. "But a fellow can do what he pleases when he's got money. Most of us see good things and can't go into the market after 'em."

"What's your guess as to the turn this Traction business will take?" asked Wheaton. He had not expected an opportunity to talk to any one of Margrave's standing on this subject, and he thought he would get some information while the opportunity offered.

"Don't ask me! If I knew I'd like to get into the game. But, look here"—he moved his fat body a little nearer to Wheaton—"the way to go into that thing is to go into it big! I've had my eye on it for a good while, but I ain't going to touch it unless I can swing it all. Now, you know Porter, and I know him, and you can bet your last dollar he'll never be able to handle it. He ain't built for it!" His voice sank to a whisper. "But if I decide to go in, I've got to get rid of Porter.

Me and Porter can't travel in the same harness. You know that," he added, pleadingly, as if there were the bitterness of years of controversy in his relations with Porter.

Wheaton nodded sympathetically.

"Now, I don't know how much he's got"—this in an angry tone, as if Porter were guilty of some grave offense against him—"and he's so damned mysterious you can't tell what he's up to. You know how he is; you can't go to a fellow like that and do business with him, and he won't play anyhow, unless you play his way."

"Well, I don't know anything about his affairs, of course," said Wheaton, yet feeling that Margrave's confidences must be reciprocated. "Just between ourselves," —he waited for Margrave to nod and grunt in his solemn way—"he did buy a little some time ago, but no great amount. It would take a good deal of money to control that company."

"You're dead right, it would; and Porter hasn't any business fooling with it. You've got to syndicate a thing like that. He's probably got a tip from some one of his Eastern friends as to what they're going to do, and he's buying in, when he can, to get next. But say, he hasn't any Traction bonds, has he?"

Wheaton had already said more than he had intended, and repented now that he had been drawn into this conversation; but Margrave was bending toward him with a great air of condescending intimacy. Porter had never been confidential with him; and it was really Margrave who had given him his start.

"I don't think so; at least I never knew of it." His

mind was on those checks to Peckham, which clearly represented purchases of stock. Of course, Porter might have bonds, too, but having gone thus far he did not like to admit to Margrave how little he really knew of Porter's doings. Margrave was puffing solemnly at his cigar, and changed the subject. When he rose to go and stood stamping down his trousers, which were forever climbing up his fat legs when he sat, Wheaton felt an impulse to correct any false impressions which he might have given Margrave; but he was afraid to try this. He would discredit himself with Margrave by doing so. He had not intended to leave so early, but he hated to let go of Margrave, and he followed him into the coat room.

"That's all between us—that little matter," said Margrave, as they were helped into their coats by the sleepy colored boy. Wheaton wanted to say this himself, but Margrave saved him the trouble.

"Certainly, Mr. Margrave."

CHAPTER XXIII

WILLIAM PORTER RETURNS FROM A JOURNEY

Porter went into Fenton's private office and shut and locked the door after him. He always did this, and Fenton, who humored his best client's whims perforce, pushed back the law book which he was reading and straightened the pens on his blotter.

"I didn't expect you back so soon," he said. Porter looked tired and there were dark rings under his eyes.

"Short horse soon curried," he remarked, pulling a packet from his overcoat.

There was something boyish in Porter's mysterious methods, which always amused Fenton when they did not alarm and exasperate him.

Porter sat down at a long table and the lawyer drew up a chair opposite him.

"Which way have you been this time?"

"Down in the country," returned Porter, indefinitely.

Fenton laughed and watched his client pulling the rubber bands from his package.

"What have you there—oats or wheat?"

"What I have here," said Porter, straightening out the crisp papers he had taken from his bundle, "is a few shares of Clarkson Traction stock."

"Oh!" Fenton picked up a ruler and played with it

until Porter had finished counting and smoothing the stock certificates.

"There you are," said the banker, passing the papers over to Fenton. "See if they're all right."

Fenton compared the names on the face of the certificates with the assignments on the back, while Porter watched him and played with a rubber band.

"The assignments are all straight," said Fenton, finally.

He sat waiting and his silence irritated Porter, who reached across and took up the certificates again.

"I want to talk to you a little about Traction."

"All right, sir," said Fenton, respectfully.

"I've gone in for that pretty deep this fall."

Fenton nodded gravely. He felt trouble in the air.

"I started in on this down East last summer. Those bonds all went East, but a lot of the stock was kicked around out here. If I get enough and reorganize the company I can handle the new securities down East all right. That's business. Now, I've been gathering in the stock around here on the quiet. Peckham's been buying some for me, and he's assigned it in blank. There's no use in getting new shares issued until we're ready to act, for Barnes and those fellows are not above doing something nasty if they think they're going to lose their jobs."

"The original stock issue was five thousand shares," said Fenton. "How much have you?"

"Well, sir," said Porter, "I've got about half and I'm looking for a few shares more right now."

Fenton picked up his ruler again and beat his

knuckles with it. Porter had expected Fenton to lecture him sharply, but the lawyer was ominously quiet.

"I'm free to confess," said Fenton, "that I'm sorry you've gone into this. This isn't the kind of thing that you're in the habit of going into. I am not much taken with the idea of mixing up in a corporation that has as disreputable a record as the Traction Company. It's been mismanaged and robbed until there's not much left for an honest man to take hold of; they issue no statements; no one of any responsibility has been connected with it for a long time. The outside stockholders are scattered all over the country, and most of them have quit trying to enforce their rights, if they may be said to have any rights. You remember that the last time they went into court they were knocked out and I'm free to say that I don't want to have to go into any litigation against the company."

"Yes, but the franchise is all straight, ain't it?"

"Probably it is all right," admitted the lawyer reluctantly, "but that isn't the whole story by any manner of means. If it's known that you're picking up the stock, every fellow that has any will soak you good and hard before he parts with it. Now, there are the bondholders—"

"Well, what can the bondholders do?" demanded Porter.

"Oh, get a receiver and have a lot of fun. You may expect that at any time, too. Those Eastern fellows are slow sometimes, but they generally know what they're about."

"Yes, but if they weren't Eastern fellows—"

"Oh, a bondholder's rights are as good one place as

another. Those suits are usually brought in the name of the trustee in their behalf."

"Now, do you know what I'm going to do?" demanded Porter, settling back in his chair and placing his feet on Fenton's table. "I'm going to turn up at the next annual meeting and clean this thing out. You don't think it's any good; I've got faith in the company and in the town; I believe it's going to be a good thing. This little gang here that's been running it has got to go. I've dug up some stock here that everybody thought was lost. At the last meeting only eight hundred out of five thousand shares were voted."

Fenton frowned and continued to punish himself with the ruler.

"You beat me! You haven't the slightest idea who the other shareholders are; the company is thoroughly rotten in all its past history, and here you go plunging into it up to your eyes. And they say you're the most conservative banker on the river."

"I guess you don't have to get me out of many scrapes," said Porter, doggedly.

"When's the annual meeting?" asked Fenton, suddenly.

"It's day after to-morrow—a close call, but I'll make it all right."

Fenton threw down his ruler impatiently.

"Mr. Porter, I want you to remember that I haven't given you any advice at all in this matter. It's an extra hazardous thing that you're doing. Now, I don't know anything definitely about it, but—I've got the impression that Margrave's paralleling your lines in this business." Porter brought his feet down with a crash.

"Where'd you get that?"

"It's this way," said Fenton, in his quietest tones. "A Baltimore lawyer that I know wrote me a letter,—I just got it this morning,—asking me about Margrave's responsibility. It seems that my friend has a client who owns some of these shares. A good deal of that stock went to Baltimore and Philadelphia, you may remember. I assume that Margrave is after it."

"Wire your friend right away not to sell,—" shouted Porter, pounding the table with his fist.

"I did that this morning, and here's his answer. I got it just before you came in. Margrave evidently got anxious and wired them to send certificates with draft through the Drovers' National. They're probably on the way now." He passed the telegram across to Porter, who put on his glasses and read it.

"Now," continued Fenton, "I don't know just what this means, but it looks to me as if Margrave was hot on the track of the trolley company himself; and Tim Margrave isn't a particularly pleasant fellow to go into business with, is he?"

"But the bondholders would still have their chance, wouldn't they, even if he got a majority of the stock?"

"Well, you haven't any bonds, have you? First thing I know you'll be telling me that you've got a few barrels of them," he added, jokingly. He could not help laughing at Porter.

Porter took the cigar from his mouth, looked carefully at the lighted end of it, and said with a casual air, as if he had a particularly decisive and conclusive statement to make and wished to avail himself of its dramatic possibilities:

"My dear boy, I've got every blamed bond!"

Fenton sat gazing at him in stupefied wonder.

"Would you mind saying that again?" he said, after a full minute of silent amazement in which he sat staring at his client, who was blowing rings of smoke with great equanimity.

"I've got all the bonds, was what I said."

The lawyer walked around the table and put his hand on Porter's shoulder. He was trying to keep from laughing, like a parent who is about to rebuke a child and yet laughs at the cause of its offense. Porter evidently thought that he had done an extremely bright thing.

"As I understand you, you have bought all of the bonds and half of the stock."

"About half. I'm a little—just a little—short."

"Will you kindly tell me what you wanted with the stock if you had the bonds?"

"Well, I figured it this way, that the franchise was worth the price I had to pay for the whole thing, and if I had the stock control I'd save the fuss of foreclosing. You lawyers always make a lot of rumpus about those things, and a receivership would prejudice the Eastern market when I come to reorganize and sell out."

Fenton lay back in his chair and laughed, while Porter looked at him a little defiantly, with his hat tipped over his eyes and a cigar sticking in his mouth at an impertinent angle.

"You'd better finish your job and make sure of your majority," said Fenton. His rage was rising now and he did not urge Porter to remain when the banker got up to go. He was not at all anxious to defend a fran-

chise which the local courts, always sensitive to public sentiment, might set aside.

"I'll see you in the morning first thing," said Porter at the door, which Fenton opened for him. "I want you to go to the meeting with me and we'll need a day to get ready."

The lawyer watched his client walk toward the elevator. It occurred to him that Porter's step was losing its elasticity. While the banker waited for the elevator car he leaned wearily against the wire screen of the shaft.

Fenton swore quietly to himself for a few minutes and then sat down with a copy of the charter of the Clarkson Traction Company before him, and spent the remainder of the day studying it. He had troubled much over Porter's secretive ways, and had labored to shatter the dangerous conceit which had gradually grown up in his client. Porter had, in fact, a contempt for lawyers, though he leaned on Fenton more than he would admit. Fenton, on the other hand, was constantly fearful lest his client should undo himself by his secretive methods. He had difficulty in getting all the facts out of him even when they were imperatively required. Once in the trial of a case for Porter, the opposing counsel made a statement which Fenton rose in full confidence to refute. His antagonist reaffirmed it, and Fenton, not doubting that he understood Porter's position thoroughly, appealed to him to deny the charge, fully expecting to score an effective point before the court. To his consternation, Porter coolly admitted the truth of the imputation. But even this incident and Fenton's importunity in every matter that arose

thereafter did not cure Porter of his weakness. He was a difficult client, who was, as Fenton often said to himself, a good deal harder to manage in a lawsuit than the trial judge or opposing counsel.

The next morning Fenton was at his office early and sent his boy at once to ask Mr. Porter to come up. The boy reported that Mr. Porter had not been at the bank. Fenton went down himself at ten o'clock and found the president's desk closed.

"Where's the boss?" he demanded.

"Won't be down this morning," said Wheaton. "Miss Porter telephoned that he wasn't feeling well, but he expected to be down after luncheon."

CHAPTER XXIV

INTERRUPTED PLANS

Porter had wakened that morning with a pain-racked body and the hot taste of fever in his mouth. He dressed and went downstairs to breakfast, but left the table and returned to his room to lie down.

"I'll be all right in an hour or so; I guess I've taken cold," he said to Evelyn. At the end of an hour he was shaking with a chill.

Evelyn left him alone to telephone for the doctor and in her absence he tried to rise and fainted. He was still lying on the floor when she returned. When the doctor came he found the household in a panic, and almost before Porter realized it, he was hazily watching the white cap of the trained nurse whom the doctor ordered with his medicines.

"Your father has a fever of some sort," he said to Evelyn. "It may be only a severe attack of malaria; but it's probably typhoid. In any event, there's nothing to be alarmed about. Mr. Porter has one of the old-fashioned constitutions," he added, reassuringly, "and there's nothing to fear for him."

Porter protested all the morning that he would go to his office after luncheon, but the temperature line on the nurse's chart climbed steadily upward. He resented the tyranny of the nurse, who moved about the room with an

air of having been there always, and he was impatient under the efforts of Evelyn to soothe him. The doctor came again at noon. He was of Porter's age and an old friend; he dealt frankly with his patient now. Evelyn stood by and listened, adding her own words of pleading and cheer; and while the doctor gave instructions to the nurse outside, he relaxed, and let her smooth his pillow and bathe his hot brow.

"This may be my turn —" he began.

"Not by any manner of means, father," she broke in with a lightness she did not feel. It moved her greatly to see his weakness.

"It's an unfortunate time," he said, "and there's something you must do for me. I've got to see Wheaton or Fenton. It's very important."

"But you mustn't, father; business can wait until you're well again. It will be only a few days—"

"You mustn't question what I ask," he went on very steadily. "It's of great importance," and she knew that he meant it.

"Can't I see them for you?" she asked. He turned his slight lean body under the covers, and shook his head helplessly on his pillow.

"You see you can't talk, father," she said very gently. "Is there anything I can say to them for you?"

"Yes," he said weakly, "I want you to give the key to one of my boxes to Wheaton. Tell him to take out a package—marked Traction—and give it to Fenton."

Evelyn brought his key ring and he pointed out the key and watched her slip it from the ring.

"I'll send for Mr. Wheaton at once," she said. "Don't worry any more about it, father."

"Evelyn!" She had started for the door, but now hurried back to him.

"Don't tell him anything over the telephone; jusk ask him to come up." She went out at once that he might be assured, and he turned wearily on his pillow and slept.

Porter's illness was proclaimed in the first editions of the afternoon papers, which Wheaton saw at his desk. News gains force by publication, and when he read the printed statement that the president of the Clarkson National Bank was confined to his house by illness, he felt that Porter must really be very sick; and he naturally turned the fact over in his mind to see how this might affect him. The directors came in and sat about in the directors' room with their hats on, and Wingate, the starch manufacturer, who had seen Porter's doctor, pronounced the president a very sick man and suggested that Thompson, the invalid vice-president, ought to be notified. The others acquiesced, and they prepared a telegram to Thompson at Phoenix, suggesting his immediate return, if possible.

Wheaton sat with them and listened respectfully. When he was first appointed to his position, he had waited with a kind of awe for the pronouncements of the directors; but he had acquired a low opinion of them. He certainly knew more about the affairs of the bank than any of them except Porter and he knew more than Porter of the details. During this informal conference of the directors, Wheaton was called to the telephone, and was cheered by the sound of Evelyn's voice. She asked him to come up as soon as convenient; she wished to give him a message from her father, who was

very comfortable, she said. After dinner would do; she knew that he must be very busy. He expressed his sympathy formally, and went back to the directors with a kindlier feeling toward the world. There was a consolation for him in the knowledge that Miss Porter must summon him to her in this way; her father's illness made another tie between them.

Wingate and the others came out of the directors' room as he put down the telephone receiver, and they stood talking at his desk. He found a secret pleasure in being able to answer at once the questions which Wingate put to him, as to how the discounts were running, and what they were carrying of county money, and how much government money they had on hand. Wingate knew no more of banking than he knew of Egyptian hieroglyphics; but he thought he did, because he had read the national banking act through and had once met the comptroller of the currency at dinner. The other directors listened to Wheaton's answers with admiration. When they got outside Wingate remarked, as they stood at the front door before dispersing:

"I wish to thunder I could ask Jim Wheaton something just once that he didn't know. That fellow knows every balance in the bank, and the date of the maturity of every loan. He's almost too good to be true."

They laughed.

"I guess Jim's all right," said the wholesale dry goods merchant, who was a good deal impressed with the fact of his directorship.

"Sure," said Wingate. "But you can bet Thompson's lungs will get a lot better when he gets our telegram." They had no great belief in Thompson's invalidism. It

is one of the drolleries of our American life that men, particularly in Western cities, never dare to be ill; it is much nobler and far more convenient to die than to be sick.

Fenton spent the afternoon in court. He intended to call at the Porters' on his way home, and stopped at the bank before going to his office, thinking that the banker might be there; but the president's desk was closed.

"How sick is Mr. Porter?" he asked Wheaton.

"He's pretty sick," said Wheaton. "It's typhoid fever."

Fenton whistled.

"That's what the doctor calls it. I spoke to Miss Porter over the telephone a few minutes ago, and she did not seem to be alarmed about her father. He's very strong, you know."

But Fenton was not listening. "See here, Wheaton," he said suddenly, "do you know anything about Porter's private affairs?"

"Not very much," said Wheaton guardedly.

"I guess you don't and I guess nobody does, worse luck! You know how morbidly secretive he is, and how he shies off from publicity,—I suppose you do," he went on a little grimly. He did not like Wheaton particularly. "Well, he has some Traction stock,—the annual meeting is held to-morrow and he's got to be represented."

"He never told me of it," said Wheaton, truthfully.

"His shares are probably in his inside pocket, or hid under the bed at home; but we've got to get them if he has any, and get them quick. If he has his wits he'll

probably try and send word to me. I suppose I couldn't see him if I went up."

"Miss Porter telephoned me to come,—on some business matter, she said, and no doubt that's what it is."

"Then I won't go just now, but I'll see you here as soon as you get down town. I'll be at my office right after dinner." He paused, deliberating. Fenton was a careful man, who rose to emergencies.

"I'll come directly back here," said Wheaton. "No doubt the papers you want are in one of Mr. Porter's private boxes."

"Can you get into it to-night?"

"Yes; it's in the vault where we keep the account books, and there's no time lock."

CHAPTER XXV

JAMES WHEATON DECLINES AN OFFER

Margrave hung up the receiver of his desk telephone with a slam, and rang a bell for the office boy.

"Call the Clarkson National, and tell Mr. Wheaton to come over,—right away."

It was late in the afternoon. Wheaton had been unusually busy with routine work and the directors had taken an hour of his time. He had turned away from Fenton to answer Margrave's message, and went toward the Transcontinental office with a feeling of foreboding. He remembered the place very well; it had hardly changed since the days of his own brief service there. As he crossed the threshold of the private office, the sight of Margrave's fat bulk squeezed into a chair that was too small for him, impressed him unpleasantly; he had come with mixed feelings, not knowing whether his friendly relations with the railroader were to be further emphasized, or whether Margrave was about to make some demand of him. His doubts were quickly dispelled by Margrave, who turned around fiercely as the door closed.

"Sit down, Wheaton," he said, indicating a chair by his desk. His face was very red and his stubby mustache seemed stiffer and more wire-like than ever. He was

breathing in the difficult choked manner of fat men in their rage.

"Now, I want you to tell me something; I want you to answer up fair and square. I've got to come right down to brass tacks with you and I want you to tell me the God's truth. How much Traction has Billy Porter got?"

Wheaton grew white, and the lids closed over his eyes sleepily.

"Come out with it," puffed Margrave. "If you've been making a fool of me I want to know it."

"I don't know what right you've got to ask me such a question," Wheaton answered coldly.

"No right,—no right!" Margrave panted. "You damned miserable fool, what do you know or mean by right or wrong either? I can take my medicine as well as the next man, but when a friend does me up, then I throw up my hands. Why did you tell me you knew what Porter was doing, and lead me to think—"

"Mr. Margrave," said Wheaton, "I didn't come here to be abused by you. If I've done you any injury, I'm not aware of it."

"I guess that's right," said Margrave ironically. "What I want to know is what you let me think Porter wasn't taking hold of Traction for? You knew I was going into it. I told you that with the fool idea that you were a friend of mine. You told me the old man had stopped buying—"

"And when I did I betrayed a confidence," said Wheaton, virtuously. "I had no business telling you anything of the kind."

"When you told me that," Margrave went on in bitter

derision, shaking his finger in Wheaton's face,—"when you told me that you told me a damned lie, that's what you did, Jim Wheaton."

"You can't talk to me that way," said Wheaton, sitting up in his chair resentfully. "When I told you that, I believed it," and he added, with a second's hesitation, "I still believe it."

"Don't lie any more to me about it. I can take my medicine as well as the next man, but—" swaying his big head back and forth on his fat shoulders,—"when a man plays a dirty trick on Tim Margrave, I want him to know when Margrave finds it out. I never thought it of you, Jim. I've always treated you as white as I knew how; I've been glad to see you in my house,—"

"I don't know what you're driving at, but I want you to stop abusing me," said Wheaton, with more vigor of tone than he had yet manifested. "I never said a word to you about Mr. Porter in connection with Traction that I didn't think true. The only mistake I made was in saying anything to you at all; but I thought you were a friend of mine. If anybody's been deceived, I'm the one."

Margrave watched him contemptuously.

"Let me ask you something, Jim," he said, dropping his blustering tone. "Haven't you known all these weeks when I've been seeing you every few days at the club, and at my own house several times,"—he dwelt on the second clause as if the breach of hospitality on Wheaton's part had been the grievous offense,—"haven't you known that the old man was chasing over the country in his carpet slippers buying all that stock he could lay his hands on?"

"On my sacred honor, I have not. When we talked of it I knew he had been buying some, but I thought he'd stopped, as I let you understand. I'm sorry if you were misled by anything I said."

"Well, that's all over now," said Margrave, in a conciliatory tone. "I'm in the devil's own hole, Jim. I've been relying on your information; in fact, I've had it in mind to make you treasurer of the company when we get reorganized. That ought to show you what a lot of confidence I've been putting in you all this time that you've been watching me run into the soup clear up to my chin."

"I'm honestly sorry,"—began Wheaton. "I had no idea you were depending on me. You ought to have known that I couldn't betray Mr. Porter."

"You ought to be sorry," said Margrave dolefully. "But, look here, Jim, I don't believe you're going to do me up on this."

"I'm not going to do anybody up; but I don't see what I can do to help you."

"Well, I do. You gave me to understand that you were buying this stuff yourself. You still got what you had?"

Margrave knew from the secretary of the company that Wheaton owned one hundred shares. He thrust his hands into his pockets and looked at Wheaton appealingly.

"Yes," Wheaton answered reluctantly. He knew now why he had been summoned.

"Now, how many shares have you, Jim?" with increasing amiability of tone and manner.

"Just what I bought in the beginning; one hundred shares."

Margrave took a pad from his desk and added one hundred to a short column of figures. He made the footing and regarded the total with careless interest before looking up.

"How much do you want for that, Jim?"

"To tell the truth, Mr. Margrave, I don't know that I want to sell it."

"Now, Jim, you ain't going to hold me up on this? You've got me into a pretty mess, and I hope you're not going to keep on pushing me in."

Wheaton crossed and recrossed his legs. There was Porter and there was Margrave. To whom did he owe allegiance? He resented the way in which Margrave had taken him to task; he could not see that he had been culpable, unless as against Porter. Yet Porter had told him nothing; if Porter had treated him with a little more frankness, he certainly would never have mentioned Traction to Margrave.

"What I have wouldn't do you any good," he said finally.

"But it might do me some harm! Now, you don't want these shares, Jim. You're entitled to a profit, and I'll pay you a fair price."

"I can't do anything to hurt Mr. Porter," said Wheaton. He remembered just how the drawing-room at the Porters' looked, and the kindness and frankness of Evelyn Porter's eyes.

"Yes, but you've got a duty to me," he stormed, getting red in the face again. "You can bet your life that if it hadn't been for you, I'd never have been

in this pickle. Come along now, Jim, I've got a lot of our railroad people to go in on this. They depend absolutely on my judgment. I'm a ruined man if I fail to show up at the meeting to-morrow with a majority of these shares. It won't make any difference to Billy Porter whether he wins out or not. He's got plenty of irons in the fire. I don't know as a matter of fact that I need these shares; but I want to be on the safe side. Does Porter know what you've got?"

Wheaton shook his head.

"Then what's the harm in selling them where you've got a chance, even if you wasn't under any obligations to me? If you didn't know until I told you that the old man was on the still hunt for this stuff, I don't see that you're bound to wait for him to come around and ask you to sell to him. How much shall I make it for?" He opened a drawer and pulled out his check-book.

"They tell me Porter's pretty sick," Margrave continued, running the stubs of the check-book through his thick thumb and forefinger. "Billy isn't as young as he used to be. Very likely he'll never know you had any Traction stock," he added significantly. "How much shall I make it for, Jim?"

Wheaton walked over to the window and looked down into the street, while Margrave watched him with pen in hand.

"How much shall I make it for?" he asked more sharply.

"You can't make it for anything, Mr. Margrave, and I want to say that I'm very much disappointed in the way you've tried to get it from me."

Margrave swung around on him with an oath. But Wheaton went on, speaking carefully.

"I can't imagine that the few shares of stock I hold can be of real importance in deciding the control of this company. I don't say I won't give you these shares, but I can't do it now."

Margrave's face grew red and purple as Wheaton walked toward the door.

"Maybe you think you can wring more out of Porter than you can out of me. But, by God, I'll take this out of you and out of him, too, if I go broke doing it."

CHAPTER XXVI

THE KEY TO A DILEMMA

Evelyn had telephoned to Mrs. Whipple of her father's illness in terms which allayed alarm; but when the afternoon paper referred to it ominously, the good woman set out through the first snowstorm of the season for the Porter house, carrying her campaign outfit, as the general called it, in a suit-case. Mrs. Whipple's hopeful equanimity was very welcome to Evelyn, who suffered as women do when denied the privilege of ministering to their sick and forced to see their natural office usurped by others. Mrs. Whipple brought a breath of May into the atmosphere of the house. She found ways of dulling the edge of Evelyn's anxiety and idleness; she even found things for Evelyn to do, and busied herself disposing of inquiries at the door and telephone to save Evelyn the trouble. In Evelyn's sitting-room Mrs. Whipple talked of clothes and made it seem a great favor for the girl to drag out several new gowns for inspection,—a kind of first view, she called it; and she sighed over them and said they were more perfect than perfect lyrics and would appeal to a larger audience.

She chose one of the lyrics of black chiffon and lace, with a high collar and half sleeves and forced Evelyn to

put it on; and when they sat down to dinner together she planned a portrait of Evelyn in the same gown, which Chase or Sargent must paint. She managed the talk tactfully, without committing the error of trying to ignore the sick man upstairs. She made his illness seem incidental merely, and with a bright side, in that it gave her a chance to spend a few days at the Hill. Then she went on:

"Warry and Mr. Saxton were at the house last night. It's delightful to see men so devoted to each other as they are; and it's great fun to hear them banter each other. I didn't know that Mr. Saxton could be funny, but in his quiet way he says the drollest things!"

"I thought he was very serious," said Evelyn. "I rarely see him, but when I do, he flatters me by talking about books. He thinks I'm literary!"

"I can't imagine it."

Evelyn laughed.

"Oh, thanks! I'm making progress!"

"It's funny," Mrs. Whipple continued, "the way he takes care of Warry. The general says Mr. Saxton is a Newfoundland and Warry a fox terrier. Warry's at work again, and I suppose we have Mr. Saxton's influence to thank."

"A man like that could do a great deal for Warry," said Evelyn. "If Warry doesn't settle down pretty soon he'll lose his chance." Then, her father coming into her thoughts, she added irrelevantly: "Mr. Thompson will probably come home. Mr. Wheaton telephoned that the directors had wired him."

"Oh, yes," said Mrs. Whipple, looking at the girl

quickly,—"so much responsibility,—I suppose it would be hardly fair to Mr. Wheaton—"

"I suppose not," said Evelyn.

"It's just the same in business as it is in the army," continued Mrs. Whipple, who referred everything back to the military establishment. "The bugle's got to blow every morning whether the colonel's sick or not. I suppose the bank keeps open just the same. When a thing's once well started it has a way of running on, whether anybody attends to it or not."

"But you couldn't get father to believe that," said Evelyn, smiling in recollection of her father's life-long refutation of this philosophy.

"No indeed," assented Mrs. Whipple. "But in the army there is a good deal to make a man humble. If he gets transferred from one end of the land to another, somebody else does the work he has been doing, and usually you wouldn't know the difference. The individual is really extinguished; they all sign their reports in exactly the same place, and one signature is just as good at Washington as another." This was a favorite line of discourse with Mrs. Whipple; she had reduced her army experience to a philosophy, which she was fond of presenting on any occasion.

The maid brought Evelyn a card before they had finished coffee.

"It's Mr. Wheaton," she explained; "I asked him to come. Father was greatly troubled about some matter which he said must not be neglected. He wanted me to give the key of his box to Mr. Wheaton,—there are some papers which it is very necessary for Mr. Fenton to have. It's something I hadn't heard of before, but it

must be important. He's been flighty this afternoon and has tried to talk about it."

Evelyn had risen and stood by the table with a troubled look on her face, as if expecting counsel; but she was thinking of the sick man upstairs and not of his business affairs.

"Yes; don't wait for me," said the older woman, as though it were merely a question of the girl's excusing herself. When Evelyn had gone, Mrs. Whipple plied her spoon in her cup long after the single lump of sugar was dissolved. Mrs. Whipple had a way of disliking people thoroughly when they did not please her, and she did not like James Wheaton. She was wondering why, as she sat alone at the table and played with the spoon.

The maid who admitted Wheaton had let him elect between the drawing room and the library, and he chose the latter instinctively, as less formal and more appropriate for an interview based on his dual social and business relations with the Porters. His slim figure appeared to advantage in evening clothes; he was no longer afraid of rooms that were handsome and spacious like this. There was nowadays no more correctly groomed man in Clarkson than he, though Warry Raridan had remarked to Wheaton at the Bachelors' that his ties were composed a trifle too neatly; a tie to be properly done should, Raridan held, leave something to the imagination. Wheaton heard the swish of Evelyn's skirts in the hall with a quickening heartbeat. Her black gown intensified her fairness; he had never seen her in black before, and it gave a new accent to her beauty as she came toward him.

"It was a great shock to us down town to hear of

your father's illness. He seemed as well as usual yesterday."

"Did you think so? I thought he looked worn when he came home last evening. He has been working very hard lately."

Wheaton had never seen her so grave. He was sincerely sorry for her trouble, and he tried to say so. There was something appealing in her unusual calm; the low tones of her voice were not wasted on him.

"Father asked me to send for you this morning, but he had grown so ill in a few hours that I took the responsibility of not doing it. The doctor said emphatically that he must not see people. But something in particular was on his mind, some papers that Mr. Fenton should have. They are in his box at the bank, and I was to give you the key to it. It is something about the Traction Company; no doubt you know of it?"

"Yes," Wheaton assented. It was not necessary for him to say that Mr. Porter had told him nothing about it.

"You can attend to this easily?"

"Yes, certainly. Mr. Fenton spoke to me about the matter this afternoon. It is very important and he wished me to report to him as soon as I found the papers. No doubt they are in your father's box," he said. "He is always very methodical." He smiled at her reassuringly and rose. She did not ask him to stay longer, but went to fetch the key.

It was a small, thin bit of steel. Wheaton turned it over in his hand.

"I'll return the key to-morrow, after I've found the papers Mr. Fenton wants."

"Very well. I hope you will have no difficulty."

He still held the key in his fingers, not knowing whether this was his dismissal or not.

"There is one thing more, Mr. Wheaton. Father seemed very much troubled about this Traction matter—"

"Very unnecessarily, I'm sure," said Wheaton soothingly.

"He evidently wished all the papers he has concerning the company to be given to Mr. Fenton. Now, this probably is of no importance whatever, but several years ago father gave me some stock in the street railway company. It came about through a little fun-making between us. We were talking of railway passes,—you know he never accepts any"—Wheaton blinked—"and I told him I'd like to have a pass on something, even if it was only a street car line."

She was smiling in her eagerness that he should understand perfectly.

"And he said he guessed he could fix that by giving me some stock in the company. I remember that he made light of it when I thanked him, and said it wasn't so important as it looked. He probably forgot it long ago. I had forgotten it myself—I never got the pass, either! but I brought the stock down thinking that Mr. Fenton might have use for it." She went over to the mantel and picked up a paper, while he watched her; and when she put it into his hand he turned it over. It was a certificate for one hundred shares, issued in due form to Evelyn Porter, but was not assigned.

"It may be important," said Wheaton, regarding the paper thoughtfully. "Mr. Fenton will know. It couldn't be used without your name on the back," he said, indicating the place on the certificate.

"Oh, should I sign it?" she asked, in the curious fluttering way in which many women approach the minor details of business. Wheaton hesitated; he did not imagine that this block of stock could be of importance, and yet the tentative business association with Miss Porter was so pleasant that he yielded to a temptation to prolong it.

"Yes, you might sign it," he said.

Evelyn went to her father's table and wrote her name as Wheaton indicated.

"A witness is required and I will supply that." And Wheaton sat down at the table and signed his name beside hers, while she stood opposite him, the tips of her fingers resting on the table.

"Evelyn Porter" and "James Wheaton." He blotted the names with Porter's blotter, Evelyn still standing by him, slightly mystified as women often are by the fact that their signatures have a value. He felt that there was something intimate in the fact of their signing themselves together there. He was thrilled by her beauty. The black lace falling from her elbows made a filmy tracery upon her white arms. Her head was bent toward him, the shaded lamp cast a glow upon her face and throat, and her slim, white hands rested on the table so near that he could have touched them. She bent her gaze upon him gravely; she, too, felt that his relations with her father made a tie between them; he was older than the other men who came to see her; she

yielded him a respect for his well-won success. A vague sense of what her father liked in him crept into her mind in the moment that she stood looking down on him; he was quiet, deft and sure,—qualities which his smoothly-combed black hair and immaculate linen seemed to emphasize. She gave, in her ignorance of business, an exaggerated importance to the trifling transaction which he had now concluded. He smiled up at her as he put down the pen.

"It isn't as serious as it looks," he said, rising.

"It must be very interesting when you understand it," she answered.

"I'm sorry—so very sorry for your trouble. I hope—if I can serve you in any way you will not hesitate—"

"You are very kind," she said. Neither moved. They regarded each other across the table with a serious fixed gaze; the sweet girlish spirit in her was held by some curious fascinating power in him. He bent toward her, his hand lightly clenched on the edge of the table.

"I hope there may never be a time when you will not feel free to command me—in any way." He spoke slowly; his words seemed to bind a chain about her and she could not move or answer. With a sudden gesture he put out his hand; it almost touched hers, and she did not shrink away.

"Good evening, Mr. Wheaton!" Mrs. Whipple, handsome and smiling, sent her greeting from the threshold, and swept into the room; and when she took his hand she held it for a moment, as an elderly woman may, while she chid him for his remissness in never coming to call on her.

On his way down the slope to the car, Wheaton felt in

his pocket several times to be sure of the key. There was something the least bit uncanny in his possession of it. Yesterday, as he knew well enough, William Porter would no more have intrusted the key of his private box to him or to any one else than he would have burned down his house. He read into his errand a trust on Porter's part that included Porter's daughter, too; but he got little satisfaction from this. He was only the most convenient messenger available. His spirits rose and fell as he debated.

The down-town streets were very quiet when he reached the business district. He went to the side door of the bank and knocked for the watchman to admit him. He took off his overcoat and hat and laid them down carefully on his own desk.

"Going to work to-night, Mr. Wheaton?" asked the watchman.

Wheaton felt that he owed it to the watchman to explain, and he said:

"There are some papers in Mr. Porter's box that I must give to Mr. Fenton to-night. They are in the old vault." This vault was often opened at night by the bookkeepers and there was no reason why the cashier should not enter it when he pleased. The watchman turned up the lights so that Wheaton could manipulate the combination, and then swung open the door. Wheaton thanked him and went in. Two keys were necessary to open all of the boxes; one was common to all and was kept by the bank. Wheaton easily found it, and then he took from his pocket Porter's key which supplemented the other. His pulses beat fast as he felt the lock yield to the thin strip of steel, and in a

moment the box lay open before his eyes. He had flashed on the electric light bulb in the vault and recognized instantly Porter's inscription "Traction" on a brown bundle. He then opened his own box and took out his Traction certificate and carried it with Porter's packet into the directors' room.

He sat playing with the package, which was sealed in green wax with the plain oval insignium of the bank. The packet was larger than he had expected it to be; he had no idea of the amount of stock it contained; and he knew nothing of the bonds. He felt tempted to open it; but clearly that was not within his instructions. He must deliver it intact to Fenton, and he would do it instantly. He hesitated, though, and drew out the certificate which Evelyn had given him and turned the crisp paper over in his hand. Each of them owned one hundred shares of Traction stock; he was not thinking of this, but of Evelyn, whose signature held his eye. It was an angular hand, and she ran her two names together with a long sweep of the pen.

His thoughts were given a new direction by the noise of a colloquy between the watchman and some one at the door. He heard his own name mentioned, and thrusting the certificates into his pocket, he went out to learn what was the matter.

"Mr. Wheaton," called the watchman, who held the door partly closed on some one, "Mr. Margrave wishes to see you."

As Wheaton walked toward the watchman, Margrave strode in heavily on the tile floor of the bank.

CHAPTER XXVII

A MEETING BETWEEN GENTLEMEN

"Hello, Wheaton," said Margrave cheerfully. "I've had the devil's own time finding you."

He advanced upon Wheaton and shook him warmly by the hand. Then, this having been for the benefit of the watchman, he said, in a low tone:

"Let's go into the directors' room, Jim, I want to see you."

The main bank room was only dimly lighted, but a cluster of electric lights burned brilliantly above the directors' mahogany table, around which were chairs of the Bank of England pattern.

"Have a seat, Mr. Margrave," said Wheaton formally. He had left the door open, but Margrave closed it carefully. Porter's bundle of papers in its manila wrapper lay on the table, and Wheaton sat down close to it.

"What you got there, greenbacks?" asked Margrave. "If you were just leaving for Canada, don't miss the train on my account."

"That isn't funny," said Wheaton, severely.

"Oh, I wouldn't be so damned sensitive," said Margrave, throwing open his overcoat and placing his hat on the table in front of him. "I guess you ain't any better than some of the rest of 'em."

"I suppose you didn't come to say that," said Wheaton. He ran his fingers over the wax seal on the packet. He wished that it were back in Porter's box.

"We were having a little talk this afternoon, Jim," began Margrave in a friendly and familiar tone, "about Traction matters. As I remember it, in our last talk, it was understood that if I needed your little bunch of Traction shares you'd let me have 'em when the time came. Now our friend Porter's sick," continued Margrave, watching Wheaton sharply with his small, keen eyes.

"Yes; he's sick," repeated Wheaton.

"He's pretty damned sick."

"I suppose you mean he is very sick; I don't know that it's so serious. I was at the house this evening."

"Comforting the daughter, no doubt," with a sneer. "Now, Jim, I'm going to say something to you and I don't want you to give back any prayer meeting talk. The chances are that Porter's going to die." He waited a moment to let the remark sink into Wheaton's consciousness, and then he went on: "I guess he won't be able to vote his stock to-morrow. I suppose you've got it or know where it is." He eyed the bundle on which Wheaton's hand at that moment rested nervously, and Wheaton sat back in his chair and thrust his hand into his trousers' pockets, looking unconcernedly at Margrave.

"I want that stock, Jim," said the railroader, quietly, "and I want you to give it to me to-night."

"Margrave," said Wheaton, and it was the first time he had so addressed him, "you must be crazy, or a fool."

"Things are going pretty well with you, Jim," Mar-

grave continued, as if in friendly canvass of Wheaton's future. "You have a good position here; when the old man's out of the way, you can marry the girl and be president of the bank. It's dead easy for a smart fellow like you. It would be too bad for you to spoil such prospects right now, when the game is all in your own hands, by failing to help a friend in trouble." Wheaton said nothing and Margrave resumed:

"You're trying to catch on to this damned society business here, and I want you to do it. I haven't got any objections to your sailing as high as you can. I know all about you. I gave you your first job when you came here—"

"I appreciate all that, Mr. Margrave," Wheaton broke in. "You said the word that got me into the Clarkson National, and I have never forgotten it."

"Well, I don't want you to forget it. But see here: as long as I recommended you and stood by you when you were a ratty little train butcher, and without knowing anything about you except that you were always on hand and kept your mouth shut, I think you owe something to me." He bent forward in his chair, which creaked under him as he shifted his bulk. "One night last fall, just before the Knights of Midas show, a drunken scamp came into my yard, and made a nasty row. I was about to turn him over to the police when he began whimpering and said he knew you. He wasn't doing any particular harm and I gave him a quarter and told him to get out; but he wanted to talk. He said—" Margrave dropped his voice and fastened his eyes on Wheaton—"he was a long-lost brother of yours. He was pretty drunk, but he seemed clear on your family

history, Jim. He said he'd done time once back in Illinois, and got you out of a scrape. He told me his name was William Wheaton, but that he had lost it in the shuffle somewhere and was known as Snyder. I gave him a quarter and started him toward Porter's where I knew you were doing the society act. I heard afterward that he found you."

Margrave creaked back in his chair and chuckled.

"He was an infernal liar," said Wheaton hotly. "And so you sent that scamp over there to make a row. I didn't think you would play me a trick like that." He was betrayed out of his usual calm control and his mouth twitched.

"Now, Jim," Margrave continued magnanimously, "I don't care a damn about your family connections. You're all right. You're good enough for me, you understand, and you're good enough for the Porters. My father was a butcher and I began life sweeping out the shop, and I guess everybody knows it; and if they don't like it, they know what they can do."

Wheaton's hand rested again on the packet before him; he had flushed to the temples, but the color slowly died out of his face. It was very still in the room, and the watchman could be heard walking across the tiled lobby outside. A patrol wagon rattled in the street with a great clang of its gong. Wheaton had moved the brown parcel a little nearer to the edge of the table; Margrave noticed this and for the first time took a serious interest in the packet. He was not built for quick evolutions, but he made what was, for a man of his bulk, a sudden movement around the table toward Wheaton, who was between him and the door.

"What you got in that paper, Jim?" he asked, puffing from his exertion.

Still Wheaton did not speak, but he picked up the parcel and took a step toward the door, Margrave advancing upon him.

Wheaton reached the door, holding the package under his arm.

"Don't touch me; don't touch me," he said, hoarsely. Margrave still came toward him. Wheaton's unengaged hand went nervously to his throat, and he fumbled at his tie. The sweat came out on his forehead. It was a curious scene, the tall, dark man in his evening clothes, pitiful in his agitation, with his back against the door, hugging the bundle under one arm; and Margrave, in his rough business suit, walking slowly toward Wheaton, who retreated before him.

"I want that package, Jim."

"Go away! go away!" The sweat shone on Wheaton's forehead in great drops. "I can't, I can't—you know I can't!"

"You damned coward!" said Margrave, laughing suddenly. "I want that bundle." He made a gesture and Wheaton dodged and shrank away. Margrave laughed again; a malicious mirth possessed him. But he grew suddenly fierce and his fat fingers closed about Wheaton's neck. Wheaton huddled against the door, holding the brown packet with both hands.

"Drop it! Drop it!" blurted Margrave. He was breathing hard.

A sharp knock at the door against which they struggled caused Margrave to spring away. He walked down the room several paces with an assumption of careless-

ness, and Wheaton, with the bundle still under his arm, turned the knob of the door.

"Hello, Wheaton!" called Fenton, blinking in the glare of the lights.

"Good evening," said Wheaton.

"How're you, Fenton," said Margrave, carelessly, but mopping his forehead with his handkerchief.

"Here are your papers," said Wheaton, almost thrusting his parcel into the lawyer's hands.

"All right," said Fenton, looking curiously from one to the other. And then he glanced at the package, as if absent-mindedly, and saw that the seal was unbroken.

"Good night, gentlemen," he said. "Sorry to have disturbed you."

"Hope you're not going to work to-night," said Margrave, solicitously.

"Oh, not very long," said the lawyer.

"Hard on honest men when lawyers work at night," continued Margrave, as the lawyer walked across the lobby.

"Yes, you railroad people can say that," Fenton flung back at him.

"How much Traction was in that package?" asked Margrave, closing the door.

"I don't know," said Wheaton, smoothing his tie. The watchman could be heard closing the outside door on Fenton.

"No, I don't think you do," returned Margrave. "You'd fixed it pretty well with Fenton. If he'd only been a minute later I'd have got that bundle. I didn't realize at first what you had there, Jim, until you kept fingering it so desperately."

"Now," he said amiably, as if the real business of the evening had just been reached, "there are those shares you own, Jim. I hope we won't be interrupted while you're getting them for me."

Wheaton hesitated.

"You get them for me," said Margrave with a change of manner, "quick!"

Wheaton still hesitated.

Margrave picked up his hat.

"I'm going from here to the *Gazette* office. You know they do what I tell 'em over there. They'd like a little story about the aristocratic Wheaton family of Ohio. Porter's girl would like that for breakfast tomorrow morning."

Wheaton hung between two inclinations, one to make terms with Margrave and assure his friendship at any hazard, the other to break with him, let the consequences be what they might. It is one of the impressive facts of human destiny that the frail barks among us are those which are sent into the least known seas. Great mariners have made charts and set warning lights, but the hidden reefs change hourly, and the great chartographer Experience cannot keep pace with them.

"Hurry up," said Margrave impatiently; "this is my busy night and I can't wait on you. Dig it up."

Wheaton's hand went slowly to his pocket. As he drew out his own certificate with nervous fingers, the certificate which Evelyn Porter had given him an hour before fell upon the table.

"That's the right color," said Margrave, snatching the paper as Wheaton sprang forward to regain it.

"Not that! not that! That isn't mine!"

Margrave stepped back and swept the face of the certificate with his eyes.

"Well, this does beat hell! I knew you stood next, Jim," he said insolently, "but I didn't know that you were on such confidential terms as all this. And you witnessed the signature. Gosh! How sweet and pretty it all is!" The paper exhaled the faint odor of sachet, and Margrave lifted it to his nostrils with a mockery of delight.

"I must have that, Margrave. I will do anything, but I must have that——You wouldn't——"

Margrave watched him maliciously, thoroughly enjoying his terror.

"How do you know I wouldn't? Give me the other one, Jim."

Still Wheaton held his own certificate; he believed for a moment that he could trade the one for the other.

"I'm not going to fool with you much longer, Jim; you either give me that certificate or I go to the *Gazette* office as straight as I can walk. Just sign it in blank, the way the other one is. I'll witness it all right."

Wheaton wrote while Margrave stood over him, holding ready a blotter which he applied to Wheaton's signature with unnecessary care.

"I hope this won't cause you any inconvenience with the lady, but you're undoubtedly a fair liar and you can fix that all right, particularly"—with a chuckle—"if the old man cashes in."

Wheaton followed Margrave's movements as if under a spell that he could not shake off. Margrave walked

toward the door with an air of nonchalance, pulling on his gloves.

"I haven't my check-book with me, Jim, but I'll settle for your stock and Miss Evelyn's, too, after I get things reorganized. It'll be worth more money then. Please give the young lady my compliments," with irritating suavity. He stopped, smoothing the backs of his gloves placidly. "That's all right, Jim, ain't it?" he asked mockingly.

"I hope you're satisfied," said Wheaton weakly. Twice, within a year, he had felt the fingers of an angry man at his throat and he did not relish the experience.

"I'm never satisfied," said Margrave, picking up his hat.

Wheaton wished to make a bargain with him, to assure his own immunity; but he did not know how to accomplish it. Margrave had threatened him, and he wished to dull the point of the threat, but he was afraid to ask a promise of him. He said, as Margrave opened the door to go out:

"Do you think Fenton noticed anything?" His tone was so pitiful in its eagerness that Margrave laughed in his face.

"I don't know, Jim, and I don't give a damn."

Wheaton did not follow him to the door, but Margrave seemed in no hurry to leave. The watchman went forward to let him out at the side entrance, and Margrave paused to light a cigar very deliberately and to urge one on the watchman.

"If he'd only been sure the old man would have died to-night," he reflected as he walked up the street, "he'd

have given me Porter's shares, easy." He went to his office, entertaining himself with this pleasant speculation. "If I'd got out of the bank with that package he'd never dared squeal," he presently concluded.

Timothy Margrave was a fair judge of character.

CHAPTER XXVIII

BROKEN GLASS

John Saxton was a good deal the worse for wear as he swung himself from a sleeper in the Clarkson station and bolted for a down-town car. Coal mining is a dirty business, and there are limits to the things that can be crowded into a suit-case. He had been crawling through four-foot veins of Kansas coal in the interest of the Neponset Trust Company, and had been delayed a day longer than he had expected. He continued to be in a good deal of a hurry after he reached his office, and he kicked aside the mail which rustled under the door as he opened it, and knelt hastily before the safe and began rattling the tumblers of the combination. He pulled out a long envelope and then with more composure consulted his watch.

It was half-past eight. He took from his memorandum calendar the leaf for the day; on it he had posted a cutting from a local newspaper announcing the annual meeting of the stockholders of the Clarkson Traction Company. The meeting was to be held, so the notice recited, between the hours of 9 a. m. and 5 p. m. of the second Tuesday of November, at the general offices of the Company in the city of Clarkson. The Exchange Building was specified, though the adminis-

trative offices of the Company were on the other side of town. Before setting forth Saxton examined his papers, which were certificates of stock in the Clarkson Traction Company. They had been sent to him by a personal friend in Boston, the trustee of an estate, with instructions to investigate and report. Having received them just as he was leaving for Kansas, there had been no opportunity for consulting Porter or Wheaton, his usual advisers in perplexing matters. Traction stock had advanced lately, despite newspaper attacks on the company and he hoped to sell his friend's shares to advantage.

Saxton had never been in the Exchange Building before and he poked about in the dark upper floors, uncertainly looking for the rooms described in the advertisement. Another man, also peering about in the hall, ran against him.

"Beg pardon, but can you tell me——"

"Good morning, Mr. Saxton, are you acquainted in this rookery?" It was Fenton, who carried a brown parcel under his arm and appeared annoyed.

"No; but I'm learning," John answered. "I'm looking for the offices of the Traction Company. Its light seems to be hid under a bushel."

"I'm looking for it, too," said Fenton. "Some humorist seems to have changed the numbers on this floor."

They traversed the halls of several floors in an effort to find the numbers specified in the notice. Fenton swore in an agreeable tone and occasionally kicked at a door in his rage. Saxton called to him presently from a dark corner where he held up a lighted match to read the number on the transom.

"Here's our number, but there's no name on the door."

Fenton advanced upon the door with long strides, but it did not open as he grasped the knob. He kicked it sharply, but there was still no response from within.

"What time is it, Saxton?" he asked over his shoulder, without abating his pounding or knocking.

Saxton stepped back and peered into his watch.

"Five minutes of nine." He was aware now that something important was in progress. He did not know Fenton well, but he knew that he was the attorney for Porter and the Clarkson National, and that he was a serious character who did not beat on doors unless he had business on the inside. Fenton now called out loudly, demanding admission. There was a low sound of voices and a sharp noise of chairs being pushed over an uncarpeted floor within; but the knob which Fenton still held and shook did not turn.

On the inside of the door Timothy Margrave and Horton, the president, Barnes, the secretary, and Percival, the treasurer of the Clarkson Traction Company, were holding the annual meeting of that corporation, in conformity with its articles of association, and according to the duly advertised notice as required by the statutes in such cases made and provided. They had, however, anticipated the hour slightly; but this was not, Margrave said, an important matter. His notions of the proper way of holding business meetings were based on his long experience in managing ward primaries.

Horton, the president, called the meeting to order. "Well, boys," said Margrave, "there ain't any use waiting on the other fellows. Business is business and we might as well get through with it."

"Shall we hear the report of the secretary and treasurer?" the president asked Margrave deferentially.

"I move that we pass that," said Margrave. He was smoothing out the certificates of his shares on the table. "I move that we proceed at once to the election of officers of the company. Is the door locked?"

"Sure," said Barnes, the secretary, but he went over and tried it. "I guess Porter ain't coming," he said in a tone of regret that was intended to be facetious, "and he must have forgotten to send proxies."

"I vote twenty-five hundred and ninety-seven shares of the common stock of this company; you gentlemen haven't more than that, have you?" The fact was that the three officers present owned only one share each as their strict legal qualification for holding office.

"I think the minutes ought to show," said the secretary, "that these were the only shares represented, and that due advertisement was published according to law, but that owing to the loss of the stock register, written notice to individual stockholders was given only to such holders of certificates as disclosed themselves."

"That's all right," said Margrave. "You fix it up, Barnes, and you'd better get Congreve to see that it's done with the legal frills." Congreve was the local counsel of Margrave's railroad, and was a man that could be trusted.

"I move," said Barnes, "that we proceed to the election of officers for the ensuing year."

"And I move," said Percival, "that the secretary be instructed to cast the ballot of the stockholders for Timothy Margrave for president."

"Consent," exclaimed Barnes, hurriedly.

Steps could be heard in the outer hall, and Margrave looked at his watch.

"I move that we adjourn to meet at my office at two o'clock, to conclude the election of officers."

Some one was shaking the outside door.

"Can't we finish now?" asked Horton, who had been promised the vice-presidency. He and the other officers were afraid of Margrave, and were reluctant to have their own elections deferred even for a few hours.

There was another knock at the door.

"At two o'clock," said Margrave decisively, as the knocking at the door was renewed. He gathered up his certificates and prepared to leave.

Saxton, standing with Fenton in the dark hall, referred to his watch again.

"Shall we go in?" he asked.

The lawyer dropped the knob of the door and drew back out of the way.

"It's too bad it's glass," said Saxton, setting his shoulder against the wooden frame over the lock. The lock held, but the door bent away from it. He braced his feet and drove his shoulder harder into the corner, at the same time pressing his hip against the lock. It refused to yield, but the glass cracked, and finally half of it fell with a crash to the floor within.

"Don't hurry yourselves, gentlemen," said Fenton, coolly, speaking through the ragged edges of broken glass. Saxton thrust his hand in to the catch and opened the door.

"Why, it's only Fenton," called Margrave in a pleasant tone to his associates, who had effected their exits safely into a rear room.

"It's only Fenton," continued the lawyer, stepping inside, "but I'll have to trouble you to wait a few minutes."

"Oh, the meeting's adjourned, if that's what you want," said Margrave.

"That won't go down," said Fenton, placing his package on the table. "You're old enough to know, Margrave, that one man can't hold a stockholders' meeting behind locked doors in a pigeon roost."

"The meeting was held regular, at the hour and place advertised," said Margrave with dignity. "A majority of the stockholders were represented."

"By you, I suppose," said Fenton, who had walked into the room followed by Saxton.

"By me," said Margrave. He had not taken off his overcoat and he now began to button it about his portly figure.

"How many shares have you?" asked the lawyer, seating himself on the edge of the table.

"I suppose you think I'm working a bluff, but I've really got the stuff this time, Fenton. To be real decent with you I don't mind telling you that I've got exactly twenty-five hundred and ninety-seven shares of this stock. I guess that's a majority all right. Now one good turn deserves another; how much has Porter got? I don't care a damn, but I'd just like to know." He stood by the table and ostentatiously played with his certificates to make Fenton's humiliation all the keener. Margrave's associates stood at the back of the room and watched him admiringly. Fenton's bundle still lay on the table, and Saxton stood with his hands in his pockets watching events. There had been no chance for him to

explain to Fenton his reasons for seeking the offices of the Traction Company and it had pleased Margrave to ignore his presence; Fenton paid no further attention to him. He wondered at Fenton's forbearance, and expected the lawyer to demolish Margrave, but Fenton said:

"You are quite right, Margrave. I hold for Mr. Porter exactly twenty-three hundred and fifty shares."

Margrave nodded patronizingly.

"Just a little under the mark."

"You may make that twenty-four hundred even," said Saxton, "if it will do you any good."

"I'm still shy," said Fenton. "Our friend clearly has the advantage."

"I suppose if you'd known how near you'd come, you'd have hustled pretty hard for the others," said Margrave, sympathetically.

"Oh, I don't know!" said Fenton, with the taunting inflection which gives slang to the phrase. He did not seem greatly disturbed. Saxton expected him to try to make terms; but the lawyer yawned in a preoccupied way, before he said:

"So long as the margin's so small, you'd better be decent and hold your stockholders' meeting according to law and let us in. I'm sure Mr. Saxton and I would be of great assistance—wise counsel and all that."

Margrave laughed his horse laugh. "You're a pretty good fellow, Fenton, and I'm sorry we can't do business together."

"Oh, well, if you won't, you won't." Fenton took up his bundle and turned to the door.

"I suppose you've got large chunks of Traction bonds,

too, Margrave. There's nothing like going in deep in these things."

Margrave winked.

"Bonds be damned. I've been hearing for four years that Traction bondholders were going to tear up the earth, but I guess those old frosts down in New England won't foreclose on me. I'll pay 'em their interest as soon as I get to going and they'll think I'm hot stuff. And say!" he ejaculated, suddenly, "if Porter's got any of those bonds don't you get gay with 'em. It's a big thing for the town to have a practical railroad man like me running the street car lines; and if I can't make 'em pay nobody can."

"You're not conceited or anything, are you, Margrave?"

"By the way, young man," said Margrave, addressing Saxton for the first time, "we won't charge you anything for breakage to-day, but don't let it happen again."

Margrave lingered to reassure and instruct his associates as to the adjourned meeting, and Saxton went out with Fenton.

"That was rather tame," said John, as he and Fenton reached the street together. "I hoped there would be some fun. These shares belong to a Boston friend and they're for sale."

"I wonder how Porter came to miss them," said Fenton, grimly. "You'd better keep them as souvenirs of the occasion. The engraving isn't bad. I turn up this way." They paused at the corner. He still carried his bundle and he drew from his pocket now a number of documents in manila jackets.

"I have a little errand at the Federal Court." They stood by a letter box and the cars of the Traction Company wheezed and clanged up Varney Street past them.

"The fact is," he said, "that Mr. Porter owns all of the bonds of the Traction Company."

Saxton nodded. He understood now why the stockholders' meeting had not disturbed Fenton.

"This is an ugly mess," the lawyer continued. "It would have suited me better to control the company through the stock so long as we had so much, but we didn't quite make it. You're friendly to Mr. Porter, aren't you?"

"Yes; I don't know how he feels toward me—"

"We can't ask him just now, so we'll take it for granted. The court will unquestionably appoint a receiver, independent of this morning's proceedings, and if you don't mind, I'll ask to have you put in temporarily, or until we can learn Mr. Porter's wishes."

"But—there are other and better men—"

"Very likely; but I particularly wish this."

"There's Mr. Wheaton—isn't he the natural man—in the bank and all that?" urged Saxton.

"Mr. Wheaton has a very exacting position and it would be unfair to add to his duties," said the lawyer. "Will you keep where I can find you the rest of the day?"

"Yes," said John; "I'll be at my office as soon as I hit a tub and a breakfast. But you can do better," he called after Fenton, who was walking rapidly toward the post-office building.

Wheaton sat at his desk all the morning hoping that Fenton would drop in to give him the result of the Trac-

tion meeting; but the lawyer did not appear at the bank. He concluded that there was little chance of learning of the outcome of the meeting until he saw the afternoon papers. A dumb terror possessed him as he reflected upon the events of the past day. It might be that the shares which Margrave had forced from him would carry the balance of power. He felt keenly the ignominy of his interview of the night before at the bank; he was sure that if he could do it over again he would eject Margrave and dare him to do his worst.

He could dramatize himself into a very heroic figure in combating Margrave. If only Margrave had not seen Snyder! It was long ago that he and his brother had made acquaintance with crime: that was the merest slip; it was his only error. It had been kind of William Wheaton to take the full burden of that theft upon himself; yet he thought with repugnance of his brother's long career of crime; he detested the weakness of a man who chose crime and squalor as his portion. He talked to customers and did his detail work as usual, and went out for luncheon to a near-by restaurant, as he had done when he was a clerk, making lack of time an excuse for not going to The Bachelors' or the club. He felt a sudden impulse to keep very much to himself, as if security lay in doing so. His confidence returned as he reviewed his relations with Timothy Margrave. He would demand the two certificates of Margrave whether they had been used against Porter or not.

Having reached this decision by the time he came in from luncheon he went to the telephone and called Evelyn to ask her how her father was and to report his

delivery of the papers in her father's box to Mr. Fenton, as instructed. Evelyn spoke hopefully of her father's illness; there were no unfavorable symptoms, and everything pointed to his recovery. It was very sweet to hear her voice in this way; and he went to his desk comforted.

CHAPTER XXIX

JOHN SAXTON, RECEIVER

At two o'clock Warry Raridan sat on a table in the United States court room, kicking his heels together and smoking a cigarette. A number of reporters stood about; the ex-president, the secretary and the treasurer of the Clarkson Traction Company loafed within the space set apart for attorneys and played with their hats. The court was sitting in chambers, and those who waited knew that in the judge's private room something was happening. The clerk came out presently with his hands full of papers and affixed the official file mark to them. Raridan was waiting for Fenton and Saxton and when they appeared together, he went across the room to meet them.

"How is it?" he asked.

"It's all right," said Fenton. "Saxton has been appointed, pending a hearing of the case on its merits, which can't be had until Mr. Porter is out again."

"I knew it was coming," said Raridan, in a low tone to Saxton, "so I came up to say that I'm glad you're recognized by the powers."

"But it's only temporary," said John. "The little interest I represent wouldn't justify it, of course. I'm still dazed that Fenton should have urged my appointment on the court."

"What I'm here for is to go on your bond, old man."

"But Fenton has fixed that,—some of the bank directors."

"All right, John."

Saxton was walking away, but he turned back. Something had gone amiss with Raridan. Several times in their friendship Saxton had unconsciously offended him. He saw that Warry was really hurt now.

"I appreciate it, Warry, and it's like you to offer; of course I'd be glad to have you."

"Well, I hoped I was as good as those other fellows," said Raridan, more cheerfully; and he went to the clerk's desk and signed the bond.

Margrave came out now with his lawyer, and they were joined by Margrave's allies of the morning. Margrave stopped to give the reporters his side of the story. He assured them that this was merely a contest between two interests for the control of the Traction Company. There had been a misunderstanding, and until the differences between the two factions of stockholders could be reconciled, the business of the company would be managed by a receiver, who was, he said, "friendly to all parties." The fact was that he had objected strenuously to Saxton's appointment, but Fenton had insisted on it and the court had paid a good deal of attention to what Fenton said. Margrave made much to the reporters of his own election to the presidency, and intimated to them that the receiver would soon be discharged and that he would assume the active management of affairs.

The papers that had been filed in the case disclosed a somewhat different situation, which was fully laid before the public, greatly to its surprise. It appeared

that William Porter owned all the bonds of the company, and only narrowly missed the stock control. The situation was thoroughly interesting. A contention between Porter and Margrave was novel in the history of Clarkson and the press made the most of it. The *Gazette,* Margrave's paper, proved him to be wholly in the right, and cited the summary action of the court in appointing an inexperienced man to the receivership as another proof of the brutal abuse of power by federal courts.

Margrave had put none of his own money into Traction stock, but had invested funds belonging to the stockholders of the Transcontinental, who had every confidence in his sagacity, and who trusted him implicitly. He advised them of the receivership in terms which led them to believe that he had brought it about as a part of his own plans. He maintained an air of mystery and winked knowingly at friends who joked him about the little *coup* by which Porter, though sick in bed, had, as they said, "cleaned him up." He told those who flattered him by twitting him on this score that he guessed Tim Margrave hadn't lost his grip yet, and that before he was knocked out, the place of eternal damnation would have been transformed into a skating rink.

CHAPTER XXX

GREEN CHARTREUSE

There is a common law of character which is greater than the canons. It fills many volumes of records in the high court of Experience, and we add to it daily by our instinctive decisions in small matters; but only the finer natures, highly endowed with discernment, master its intricacies. The decalogue is a safe guide-post on the great highway of life; but it does not avail the lost pilgrim who stumbles in remote by-paths. The spirit is the only arbiter of the nicer distinctions between right and wrong. James Wheaton did not steal; he would do no murder; he was not even unusually covetous. If the tests which Destiny applied to him had related to the great fundamentals of conduct, he would not have been found wanting; but they were directed against seemingly unimportant weaknesses, along the lines of his least resistance to evil.

A week had passed since Saxton's appointment to the receivership and Wheaton went to and from his work with many misgivings. Several of Wheaton's friends had confided to him their belief that he ought to have been appointed receiver instead of Saxton, and there was little that he could say to this, except that he had no time for it. He had become nervous and distraught,

and was irritable under the jesting of his associates at The Bachelors'. There was a good deal of joking at their table for several days after Saxton's appointment over Margrave's discomfiture, to which Wheaton contributed little. He felt decidedly ill at ease under it. Thompson, the cashier, had come home, and Wheaton found his presence irksome.

He had seen Margrave several times at the club since their last interview at the bank and Margrave had nodded distantly, as if he hardly remembered Wheaton. Wheaton assumed that sooner or later Margrave would offer to pay him for his shares of Traction stock. But while the loss of his own certificate, under all the circumstances, did not trouble him, Margrave's appropriation of Evelyn Porter's shares was an unpleasant fact that haunted all his waking hours.

One evening, a week after the receivership incident, he resolved to go to Margrave and demand, at any hazard, the return of Evelyn's certificate. The idea seized firm hold upon him, and he set out at once for Margrave's house. He inquired for Margrave at the door, and the maid asked him to go into the library. They were entertaining at dinner, she told him, and he said he would wait. He walked nervously up and down in the well-appointed library, where Warry Raridan's purchases looked out at him from the solid mahogany bookcases. He heard the hum of voices faintly from the dining-room.

He picked up a magazine and tried to read, but the printed pages did not hold his eyes. He did not know how Margrave would treat him, and he would have escaped from the house if he had dared. Margrave came

in presently, fat and ugly in his evening clothes. He welcomed Wheaton noisily and introduced him to his guests, two directors of the Transcontinental and their wives, who were passing through town on their way to California.

Mrs. Margrave and Mabel greeted Wheaton cordially. Mabel was dressed to impress the ladies from New York, and was succeeding. The colored butler passed coffee and cigars and green chartreuse, and when Wheaton declined a cigar, Mabel brought him a cigarette from the taboret from which "The Men" were helped to such trifles. Mrs. Margrave was oppressed by the presence in her home of so many millions and so much social distinction as her guests represented, and she contributed only murmurs of assent to the conversation which Mabel led with ease, discoursing in her most Tyringhamesque manner of yacht races, horse shows and like matters of metropolitan interest. Wheaton was glad now that he had come; Margrave's guests were people worth meeting; he liked the talk, and the chartreuse gave elegance to the occasion.

Margrave accommodated his heavy frame to the soft indulgence of a huge leather chair and drained the liqueur from his glass at a gulp.

"Well, gentlemen, I'm glad Mr. Wheaton could drop in to-night. He's a friend of the road and of ours. If everybody treated the Transcontinental as well as he does,—well, a good many things would be different!"

He looked at Wheaton admiringly, and his guests followed his gaze with polite interest.

"Why, gentlemen," said Margrave, straining forward until his face was purple, "Wheaton did his level best for

me in that Traction deal; yes, sir, he worked with us on that, and if it hadn't been for that fool judge we'd have had it all fixed." He leaned back and nodded at Wheaton benignantly.

Wheaton had merely murmured at intervals during this deliverance. He did not know what Margrave meant. He moved over by Mrs. Margrave and tried to make talk with her. As soon as he felt that he could go decently, he rose and shook hands with the visiting gentlemen and bowed to the ladies. Margrave took him by the arm with an air of great intimacy and affection and walked with him to the hall, where he made much of helping Wheaton into his overcoat.

"I wanted to see you on a business matter," Wheaton began, in a low tone.

"Oh, yes," said Margrave loudly, "I forgot to mail you that check. I've been terribly rushed lately; but in time, my boy, in time!"

The people in the library could hardly have failed to hear every word.

"Oh, not that, not that! I mean that other certificate." Wheaton was trying to drop the conversation to a whispering basis as he drew on his gloves. Margrave had again taken his arm and was walking with him toward the front door, talking gustily all the while. He swung the door open and followed Wheaton out upon the front step.

"A glorious night! glorious!" he ejaculated, puffing from his walk. His hand wandered up Wheaton's arm until it reached his collar, and after he had allowed his fingers to grasp this lingeringly, he gave Wheaton a

sudden push forward, still holding his collar, then raised his fat leg and kicked him from the step.

"Come again, Jim?" he called pleasantly, as he backed within the door and closed it to return to his guests.

Wheaton reached his room, filled with righteous indignation. He might have known that a coarse fellow like Margrave cared only for people whom he could control; and he decided after a night of reflection that he had acted handsomely in saving Porter's package of securities from Margrave the night of the encounter at the bank. The more he thought of it, the more certain he grew that he could, if it became necessary to protect himself in any way, turn the tables on Margrave. He called Margrave a scoundrel in his thoughts, and was half persuaded to go at once to Fenton and explain why Margrave had been at the bank on the night that Fenton had found him there.

Wheaton continued to call at the Porters' daily to make inquiry for the head of the house. On some of these occasions he saw Evelyn, but Mrs. Whipple, whose staying qualities were born of a rigid military sense of duty, was always there; and he had not seen Evelyn alone since she gave him her father's key. Other young men, friends of Evelyn, called, he found, just as he did, to make inquiry about Mr. Porter. Mrs. Whipple had a way of saying very artlessly, and with a little sigh that carried weight, that Mr. Raridan was so very kind. Wheaton wanted to be very kind himself, but he never happened to be about when the servants were busy and there were important prescriptions to be filled at the apothecary's.

On the whole he was very miserable and when, one

morning, while Porter's condition was still precarious, he received a letter from Snyder, postmarked Spokane, declaring that money was immediately required to support him until he could find work, he closed that issue finally in a brief letter which was not couched in diplomatic language. The four days that were necessary for the delivery of this letter had hardly passed before Wheaton received a telegram sharply demanding a remittance by wire. This Wheaton did not answer; he had done all that he intended to do for William Snyder, who was well out of the way, and much more safely so if he had no money. The correspondence was not at an end, however, for a threatening letter in Snyder's eccentric orthography followed, and this, too, Wheaton dropped into his waste paper basket and dismissed from his mind.

CHAPTER XXXI

PUZZLING AUTOGRAPHS

The affairs of the Traction Company proved to be in a wretched tangle. Saxton employed an expert accountant to open a set of books for the company, while he gave his own immediate attention to the physical condition of the property. The company's service was a byword and a hissing in the town, and he did what he could to better it, working long hours, but enjoying the labor. It had been a sudden impulse on Fenton's part to have Saxton made receiver. In Saxton's first days at Clarkson he had taken legal advice of Fenton in matters which had already been placed in the lawyer's hands by the bank; but most of these had long been closed, and Saxton had latterly gone to Raridan for such legal assistance as he needed from time to time. Fenton had firmly intended asking Wheaton's appointment; this seemed to him perfectly natural and proper in view of Wheaton's position in the bank and his relations with Porter, which were much less confidential than even Fenton imagined.

Fenton had been disturbed to find Margrave and Wheaton together in the directors' room the night before the annual meeting of the Traction stockholders. He could imagine no business that would bring them

together; and the hour and the place were not propitious for forming new alliances for the bank. Wheaton had appeared agitated as he passed out the packet of bonds and stocks; and Margrave's efforts at gaiety had only increased Fenton's suspicions. From every point of view it was unfortunate that Porter should have fallen ill just at this time; but it was, on the whole, just as well to take warning from circumstances that were even slightly suspicious, and he had decided that Wheaton should not have the receivership. He had not considered Saxton in this connection until the hour of the Traction meeting; and he had inwardly debated it until the moment of his decision at the street corner.

He had expected to supervise Saxton's acts, but the receiver had taken hold of the company's affairs with a zeal and an intelligence which surprised him. Saxton wasn't so slow as he looked, he said to the federal judge, who had accepted Saxton wholly on Fenton's recommendation. Within a fortnight Saxton had improved the service of the company to the public so markedly that the newspapers praised him. He reduced the office force to a working basis and installed a cashier who was warranted not to steal. It appeared that the motormen and conductors held their positions by paying tribute to certain minor officers, and Saxton applied heroic treatment to these abuses without ado.

The motormen and conductors grew used to the big blond in the long gray ulster who was forever swinging himself aboard the cars and asking them questions. They affectionately called him "Whiskers," for no obvious reason, and the report that Saxton had, in one of the power-houses, filled his pipe with sweepings of to-

bacco factories known in the trade as "Trolleyman's Special," had further endeared him to those men whose pay checks bore his name as receiver. In snow-storms the Traction Company had usually given up with only a tame struggle, but Saxton devised a new snow-plow, which he hitched to a trolley and drove with his own hand over the Traction Company's tracks.

John was cleaning out the desk of the late secretary of the company one evening while Raridan read a newspaper and waited for him. Warry was often lonely these days. Saxton was too much engrossed to find time for frivolity, and Mr. Porter's illness cut sharply in on Warry's visits to the Hill. The widow's clothes lines were tied in a hard knot in the federal court, to which he had removed them, and he was resting while he waited for the Transcontinental to exhaust its usual tactics of delay and come to trial. On Fenton's suggestion Saxton had intrusted to Raridan some matters pertaining to the receivership, and these served to carry Warry over an interval of idleness and restlessness.

"You may hang me!" said Saxton suddenly. He had that day unexpectedly come upon the long-lost stock records of the company and was now examining them. Thrust into one of the books were two canceled certificates.

"It's certainly queer," he said, as Warry went over to his desk. He spread out one of the certificates which Margrave had taken from Wheaton the night before the annual meeting. "That's certainly Wheaton's endorsement all right enough."

Raridan took off his glasses and brought his near-sighted gaze to bear critically upon the paper.

"There's no doubt about it."

"And look at this, too." Saxton handed him Evelyn Porter's certificate. Raridan examined it and Evelyn's signature on the back with greater care. He carried the paper nearer to the light, and scanned it again while Saxton watched him and smoked his pipe.

"You notice that Wheaton witnessed the signature."

Raridan nodded. Saxton, who knew his friend's moods thoroughly, saw that he was troubled.

"I can find no plausible explanation of that," said Saxton. "Anybody may be called on to witness a signature; but I can't explain this." He opened the stock record and followed the history of the two certificates from one page to another. It was clear enough that the certificates held by Evelyn Porter and James Wheaton had been merged into one, which had been made out in the name of Timothy Margrave, and dated the day before the annual meeting.

"It doesn't make much difference at present," said Saxton. "When Mr. Porter comes down town he will undoubtedly go over this whole business and he can easily explain these matters."

"It makes a lot of difference," said Warry, gloomily.

"We'd better not say anything about this just now—not even to Fenton," Saxton suggested. "I'll take these things over to my other office for safe keeping. Some one may want them badly enough to look for them."

Raridan sat down with his newspaper and pretended to be reading until Saxton was ready to go.

CHAPTER XXXII

CROSSED WIRES

A great storm came out of the north late in January and beat fiercely upon Clafkson. It left a burden of snow on the town and was followed by a week of bitter cold. The sun shone impotently upon the great drifts which filled the streets; it seemed curiously remote, and ashamed of its failure to impress the white, dazzling masses. The wires sang their song of the cold; even the confused wires of the Clarkson Traction Company lifted up their voices, somewhat to the irritation of John Saxton, receiver, as he fought the snow banks below and sought to disentangle the twisted wires above. Upper Varney Street, beyond Porter Hill, was receiving his attention late one afternoon as the winter sunset burned red in the west. The iron poles of the trolley wires had been pulled far over into the street by the blast and the weight of snow; and trolley, telephone, and electric light wires were a baffling tangle which workmen were seeking to straighten. Saxton's men had detached their own wires and were restoring them to the poles. Traffic on the Varney Street line would, he concluded, be resumed on the morrow; and he gave final instructions to the foreman of the repair crew and turned toward his office.

Evelyn Porter, who had come out for the walk she had been taking every afternoon since the beginning of her father's illness, stopped at the narrow aisle which had been trampled in the snow-piled sidewalk to watch an adventurous lineman scale an icy telephone pole. There is a vintage of the North that is more stimulating than any that comes out of Southern vineyards. It brings a glow to the cheeks, a sparkle to the eyes, and a nimbleness to the tongue which no product of the wine-press ever gives. It is a wine that makes the heart leap and the blood tingle. It is distilled in the great ice-clasped seas of the North, and the pine and balsam of snowy woods add their quintessence to it; it tickles no palate but is assimilated directly into the blood of the brave and strong; it is the wine of youth, of perpetual youth. Evelyn felt the joy of it to-day, her heart leaped with it,—it was a delight to be abroad in the pure, cold air. Her coloring was freshly accented. The remote Scotch grandmother who conferred it upon her, across years of migration, would have rejoiced in it; where the Irish strain maintained its light of humor in her blue eyes, the gray mist of the Scotch moors still held its own. There are women who are dominated by their clothes; but Evelyn Porter was not one of them. Her dark green skirt might have belonged to any other girl, but it would not have swayed in just the same way to any other step; and her toque and cape of sable would have lost their distinction on any other head and shoulders. Her father's convalescence was only a matter of time and care; he had withstood the fever better than the physicians had thought possible, and there was no question of his restoration to health. It was good to be

free of the anxious strain, and the keen air was like a tonic to her happiness. Saxton recognized her as he jumped over the drifted snow at the curb to the path. His face, where it was visible between his cap and collar, was red from the cold.

"They say freezing to death's an easy way,—but I don't believe I'd prefer it."

"Oh, it's you, is it? I wondered who the busy man was." She was interested in the lineman, the points of whose climbers were shaking down the ice coating of the pole as he ascended.

"Won't you order that man to come down? It isn't nice to make him risk his life for a wire or two."

"He's not my man," said John, beating his hands together, "he's fixing telephone wires, and besides, he's not taking any chances."

Evelyn half turned away to continue her walk, still with her eyes on the lineman.

"Poor fellow; it must be very cold up there."

"Yes, polar expeditions are usually that way."

"Wretched man, to pun about a human life in peril!" The lineman was sitting on one of the cross beams, and Evelyn started ahead, Saxton following.

"Is that the overcoat?" she asked, over her shoulder.

"What overcoat?"

"The one that's in the newspapers. Aren't you the man in the gray ulster who runs the trolleys?"

"I've been too busy to read the papers, so I don't know."

"It might pay you to join a current topics class and learn what's going on."

"That presupposes a little knowledge. I'd never pass the entrance exams."

"You needn't be afraid, they probably carry a prep. department."

"My wires are down and the trolley isn't running!"

She laughed, and it was pleasant to hear her, John thought.

"Is that the kind of things you say? They are making you out a humorist."

"There's no harder lot. Who is this enemy that's undoing me?"

"There's a certain person called Raridan. He's always telling me of the things you say."

"The villain! I merely lecture him for his good; and so he thought I was joking!"

They had reached the Porter grounds where the walk had been cleared, and they stamped the snow from their shoes on the cement pavement and walked on together. Evelyn dropped her tone of raillery, and John asked about her father. John had followed Mr. Porter's sickness through Raridan's reports, and had called at the house only a few times since the banker's seizure. They entered the gate at the foot of the hill and walked up the long slope to the door.

"Won't you come in?" she asked.

"I oughtn't to; there's work waiting for me down town."

She sent the maid who let them in for hot water, and threw down her furs in the hall while it was being brought. The tea table had been moved into the library during Mrs. Whipple's visit, and Evelyn left John to revive the fire while she went to speak to her father.

Saxton had not taken off his coat, and when she came back he stood buttoning it as if he meant to leave.

"It's historic, but not exactly a handsome garment," she said, shaking the tea caddy.

"You shake the caddy when you can't hit the ball: new rule of golf." He had buttoned his ulster to the chin, and really intended to go. She poured the steaming water into the tea-pot, and walked to the fire with folded arms, shivering.

"Of course, if you prefer your uniform!" She spread her hands to the flames. Her mood was new to him; he felt suddenly that he knew her better than ever before; and this having occurred to him as he stood watching her, he accused himself instantly. He had no right to be there; no one had any right to be there but Warry Raridan! She had turned swiftly and was smiling at him. The darkness had fallen suddenly outside. The maid went about closing blinds and turning on the lights. He felt, by anticipation, the loneliness that lay for him beyond the soft glow of this room. This was, after all, only a moment's respite.

Evelyn was back at the tea table. She held a lump of sugar poised above a cup, and looked at him inquiringly, as though of course he was staying and wished his tea. He unbuttoned the coat and threw it on a chair.

"One lump, thanks!"

"It was the sandwiches that did it, I'm sure," she said, passing him a plate of bread and butter.

"I should like to refute your statement, but candor compels me to admit its truth," he answered. "I just

happen to remember that I haven't had luncheon yet. Excuse me if I take two."

She went to the wall and pushed a button.

"You're a foolish person and I'm going to punish you. Father's beef tea is ready day and night, and"—she said to the Swedish maid,—"bring some more hot water and the decanter."

"*J'y suis; j'y reste.* I think I have died and gone to Heaven."

"You don't deserve Heaven. Why didn't you tell me?"

"That I wanted a sandwich? They advised me against it as a kid. We are taught repression in Massachusetts and I try to live up to my training."

He pronounced beef tea no such deadly drug as it was reported to be, and he drank it until she was content. He concocted a hot toddy while she twitted him about his use of the tea-table implements for so ignoble a use; and she made him talk of his work and of the Traction Company's affairs.

"Mr. Wheaton has explained about it," she said, "and Warry too. Warry seems to be very much interested in some work he is doing in connection with it."

"Yes, he does his work well, too!" said John, with enthusiasm. He had no right to be there; but being there he could praise his friend. He told her in detail about some of Warry's work. Warry had, he said, a legal mind, and knew the philosophy of the law as only the old-time lawyers did. He rose and replenished the fire and went on talking. Some amusing incidents had occurred in the adjustment of legal questions relating

to the receivership and he told of them in a way to reflect the greatest credit on Warry.

"It looks awfully complicated—the receivership and all that. Father has begun to ask questions, but we don't encourage him."

"I'll have a good deal to explain and apologize for, when he is able to take a hand," said John.

"I'm sure father will be grateful. Mr. Wheaton and Warry are very enthusiastic about your work." She laughed out suddenly. "Warry says you have made two cars go where none had gone before."

"They have a joke down town in refutation of that. They illustrate the erratic service of the Varney Street line by saying that the cars are like bananas—short, yellow, and come in bunches."

He walked to the fireplace and took up the poker. "I have been prodigally generous with Mr. Porter's wood. It burns awfully fast." The flame had died down to a few uncertain embers which he touched tentatively with the poker. "When it goes out I'll have to go with it."

"The joke is poor, Mr. Saxton. You can hardly sustain a reputation on sayings of that sort." She put down her tea cup and went over to the fire and poked the ashes gravely.

"One might construe those actions in two ways," he said, meditatively, as if the subject were one of weight. "One cannot tell whether the sibyl is trying to encourage or to blight the dying flame. Just another poke in that corner and it will be gone."

Evelyn menaced the ember with the iron rod but did not touch it.

"The lady's position is one of great delicacy," continued John. "Between her instinct for self defense, and her gracious hospitality, she wavers. A touch might revive the flame, or it might extinguish it utterly! She hesitates between two inclinations—"

"Why should you intimate that I hesitate?"

"Her seeming reluctance to apply the poker to the crucial point, speaks for itself," continued John, solemnly, while Evelyn still hung over the fitful flame, which was growing fainter and fainter. "She's clearly afraid of the chance of resuscitating the fire and thereby saving a poor guest from the cold, hard world."

Evelyn administered a gentle prod; the burnt fragment of wood fell apart, the flame flared hopefully once and then passed into a wraith of itself that curled dolorously into the chimney.

"You see you made me do it," said Evelyn, turning on him. He looked at her very seriously and there was no mirth in his laugh.

"Good night," he said, and came toward her. "I feel like a burnt sacrifice."

"But you brought it on yourself! I wish, though, you'd stay to dinner. Sandwiches aren't very filling."

"In wholesale lots they are. Mine were seven; and my strength is as the strength of ten because the punch was pure."

He had buttoned himself into his ulster, which magnified his tall, broad figure, and was walking toward the door. His time was now filled with congenial work, which he was doing well, but still he did not quite lose that air of injury, of having suffered defeat, which had from the first touched her in him.

When Grant, who had not returned to school after the Christmas holidays, came in, she was still standing by the fire. He had been coasting on the hillside, and was aglow from the exercise.

"I met Mr. Saxton outside and asked him to stay to dinner," said the boy, helping himself to sandwiches at the tea table.

"I asked him, too," said Evelyn, "but he couldn't stay. I didn't know he was a friend of yours, Grant."

"Well, he's all right," continued Grant, biting into a fresh sandwich, and unconsciously adopting one of his father's phrases. "He doesn't guy me the way Warry does. He talks to me as if I had some sense, and he's going to let me ride on the trolley plow the next time it snows. He's a Harvard man. I want to go to Harvard, Evelyn."

The girl laughed.

"You're a funny boy, Grant," she said.

CHAPTER XXXIII

A DISAPPEARANCE

The iron thrall of winter was broken at last. Great winds still blew in the valley, but their keen edge was dulled. Their errand was not to destroy now, but to build. Robins and bluejays, coming before the daffodils dared, looked down from bare boughs upon the receding line of snow on the Porter hillside. The yellow river had shaken itself free of ice, and its swollen flood rolled seaward. Porter watched it from his windows; and early in March he was allowed to take short walks in the grounds, followed by his Scotch gardener, with whom he planned the floral campaign of the summer. Indoors he studied the alluring catalogues of the seedsmen, an annual joy with him.

Grant was still at home. He had not been well, and Evelyn kept him out of school on the plea that he would help to amuse his father. Porter was much weakened by his illness, and though he pleaded daily to be allowed to go to the bank, he submitted to Evelyn's refusal with a tameness that was new in him. Fenton came several times for short interviews; Thompson called as an old friend as well as a business associate, but he was prone to discuss his own health to the exclusion of bank affairs. Wheaton was often at

the house, and Porter preferred his account of bank matters to Thompson's. Wheaton carried the figures in his head, and answered questions offhand, while Thompson was helpless without the statements which he was always having the clerks make for him. Porter fretted and fumed over Traction matters, though Fenton did his best to reassure him.

He did not understand why Saxton should have been made receiver; if Fenton was able to dictate the appointment, why did he ignore Wheaton, who could have been spared from the bank easily enough when Thompson returned. Fenton did not tell him the true reason —he was not sure of it himself—but he urged the fact that Saxton represented certain shares which were entitled to consideration, and he made much of the danger of Thompson's breaking down at any moment and having to leave. Porter dreaded litigation, and wanted to know how soon the receivership could be terminated and the company reorganized. The only comfort he derived from the situation was the victory which had been gained over Margrave, who had repeatedly sent messages to the house asking for an interview with Porter at the earliest moment possible. The banker's humor had not been injured by the fever, and he told Evelyn and the doctor that he'd almost be willing to stay in bed a while longer merely to annoy Tim Margrave.

"If I'd known I was going to be sick, I guess I wouldn't have tackled it," he said to Fenton one day, holding up his thin hand to the fire. The doctors had found his heart weak and had cut off his tobacco,

which he missed sorely. "I might unload as soon as we can rebond and reorganize."

"That's for you to say," answered the lawyer. "Margrave wanted it, and no doubt he would be glad to take it off your hands if you care to deal with him."

"If I was sure I had a dead horse, I guess I'd as lief let Tim curry him as any man in town; but I don't believe this animal is dead."

"Not much," said the lawyer reassuringly. "Saxton says he's making money every day, now that nobody is stealing the revenues. He's painting the open cars and expects to do much better through the summer."

"I guess Saxton doesn't know much about the business," said Porter.

"He knows more than he did. He's all right, that fellow—slow but sure. He's been a surprise to everybody. He's solid with the men too, they tell me. I guess there won't be any strikes while he's in charge."

"You'd better get a good man to keep the accounts," Porter suggested. "Wheaton's pretty keen on such things."

"Oh, that's all fixed. Saxton brought a man out from an Eastern audit company to run that for him, and he deposits with the bank."

"All right," said Porter, weakly.

Saxton came and talked to him of the receivership several times, and Porter quizzed him about it in his characteristic vein. Saxton was very patient under his cross-examination, and reassured the banker by his manner and his facts. Porter had lost his cocky, jaunty way, and after the first interview he contented himself with asking how the receipts were running and how

they compared with those of the year previous. Saxton suggested several times to Fenton that he would relinquish the receivership, now that Porter was able to nominate some one to his own liking. The lawyer would not have it so. He believed in Saxton and he felt sure that when Porter could get about and see what the receiver had accomplished he would be satisfied. It would be foolish to make a change until Porter had fully recovered and was able to take hold of Traction matters in earnest.

Saxton had suddenly become a person of importance in the community. The public continued to be mystified by the legal stroke which had placed William Porter virtually in possession of the property; and it naturally took a deep interest in the court's agent who was managing it so successfully. Warry Raridan was delighted to find Saxton praised, and he dealt ironically with those who expressed surprise at Saxton's capacity. He was glad to be associated with John, and when he could find an excuse, he liked to visit the power house with him, and to identify himself in any way possible with his friend's work. During the extreme cold he paid from his own pocket for the hot coffee which was handed up to the motormen along all the lines, and gave it out to the newspapers that the receiver was doing it. John warned him that this would appear reckless and injure him with the judge of the court to whom he was responsible.

Though Porter was not strong enough to resume his business burdens, he was the better able in his abundant leisure to quibble over domestic and social matters with an invalid's unreason. He was troubled because

Evelyn would not go out; she had missed practically all the social gaiety of the winter by reason of his illness, and he wished her to feel free to leave him when she liked. In his careful reading of the newspapers he noted the items classified under "The Giddy Throng" and "Social Clarkson," and it pained him to miss Evelyn's name in the list of those who "poured," or "assisted," or "were charming" in some particular raiment. Evelyn was now able to plead Lent as an excuse for spending her evenings at home, but when he found invitations lying about as he prowled over the house, he continued to reprove her for declining them. He had an idea that she would lose prestige by her abstinence; but she declared that she had adopted a new rule of life, and that henceforth she would not go anywhere without him.

The doctor now advised a change for Porter, the purpose of which was to make it impossible for him to return to his work before his complete recovery. Evelyn and the doctor chose Asheville before they mentioned it to him, and the plan, of course, included Grant. Mrs. Whipple still supervised the Porter household at long range, and the general frequently called alone to help the banker over the hard places in his convalescence, and to soothe him for the loss of his tobacco, which the doctors did not promise to restore.

A day had been fixed for their departure, and Mrs. Whipple was reviewing and approving their plans in the library, as Evelyn and her father and Grant discussed them.

"We shall probably not see you at home much in the future," Mrs. Whipple said to Mr. Porter, who lay in

invalid ease on a lounge, with a Roman comforter over his knees. "You'll be sure to become the worst of gad-abouts—Europe, the far East, and all that."

Porter groaned, knowing that she was mocking him.

"I guess not," he said, emphatically. "I never expect to have any time for loafing, and you can't teach an old dog new tricks."

"Well, you're going now, anyhow. Don't let this girl get into mischief while you're away. An invalid father—only a young brother to care for her and keep the suitors away! Be sure and bring her back without a trail of encumbrances. Grant," she said, turning to the boy, "you must protect Evelyn from those Eastern men."

"I'll do my best," the lad answered. "Evelyn doesn't like dudes, and Warry says all the real men live out West."

"I guess that's right," said Mr. Porter.

She rose, gathering her wrap about her. Grant rose as she did. His manners were very nice, and he walked into the hall and took up his hat to go down to the car with Mrs. Whipple. It was dusk, and a man was going through the grounds lighting the lamps. Mrs. Whipple talked with her usual vivacity of the New Hampshire school which the boy had attended, and of the trip he was about to make with his father and sister. They stood at the curb in front of the Porter gate waiting for her car. A buggy stopped near them and a man alighted and stood talking to a companion who remained seated.

"Is this the way to Mr. Porter's stable?" one of the men called to them.

"Yes," Grant answered, as he stepped into the street to signal the car. The man who had alighted got back into the buggy as if to drive into the grounds. The street light overhead hissed and then burned brightly above them. Mrs. Whipple turned and saw one of the men plainly. The car came to a stop; Grant helped her aboard, and waved his hand to her as she gained the platform.

At nine o'clock a general alarm was sent out in Clarkson that Grant Porter had disappeared.

CHAPTER XXXIV

JOHN SAXTON SUGGESTS A CLUE

Wheaton sat in his room at The Bachelors' the next evening, clutching a copy of a *Gazette* extra in which a few sentences under long headlines gave the latest rumor about the mysterious disappearance of Grant Porter. Within a fortnight he had received several warnings from his brother marking his itinerary eastward. Snyder was evidently moving with a fixed purpose; and, as Wheaton had received brief notes from him couched in phrases of amiable irony, postmarked Denver, and then, within a few days, Kansas City, he surmised that his brother was traveling on fast trains and therefore with money in his purse.

He had that morning received a postal card, signed "W. W.," which bore a few taunting sentences in a handwriting which Wheaton readily recognized. He did not for an instant question that William Wheaton, *alias* Snyder, had abducted Grant Porter, nor did he belittle the situation thus created as it affected him. He faced it coldly, as was his way. He ought not to have refused Snyder's appeals, he confessed to himself; the debt he owed his brother for bearing the whole burden of their common youthful crime had never been discharged. The bribes and subterfuges which Wheaton had em-

ployed to keep him away from Clarkson had never been prompted by brotherly gratitude or generosity, but always by his fear of having so odious a connection made public. This was one line of reflection; on the other hand, the time for dealing with his brother in a spirit of tolerant philanthropy was now past. He was face to face with the crucial moment where concealment involved complicity in a crime. His duty lay clear before him—his duty to his friends, the Porters—to the woman whom he knew he loved. Was he equal to it? If Snyder were caught he would be sure to take revenge on him; and Wheaton knew that no matter how guiltless he might show himself in the eyes of the world, his career would be at an end; he could not live in Clarkson; Evelyn Porter would never see him again.

The *Gazette* stated that a district telegraph messenger had left at Mr. Porter's door a note which named the terms on which Grant could be ransomed. The amount was large,—more money than James Wheaton possessed; it was not a great deal for William Porter to pay. It had already occurred to Wheaton that he might pay the ransom himself and carry the boy home, thus establishing forever a claim upon the Porters. He quickly dismissed this; the risks of exposure were too great. He smoked a cigarette as he turned all these matters over in his mind. Clearly, the best thing to do was to let the climax come. His brother was a criminal with a record, who would not find it easy to drag him into the mire. His own career and position in Clarkson were unassailable. Very likely the boy would be found quickly and the incident would close with Snyder's sentence to a long imprisonment. By the time the China-

man called him to dinner he was able to view the case calmly. He would face it out no matter what happened; and the more he thought of it the likelier it seemed that Snyder had overleaped himself and would soon be where he could no longer be a menace.

He went down to dinner late, in the clothes that he had worn at the bank all day and thus brought upon himself the banter of Caldwell, the Transcontinental agent, who sang out as he entered the dining-room door:

"What's the matter, Wheaton? Sold or pawned your other clothes?"

Wheaton smiled wanly.

"Only a little tired," he said.

"Come on now and give us the real truth about the kidnapping," said Caldwell with cheerful interest. "You'd better watch the bank or the same gang may carry it off next."

"I guess the bank's safe enough," Wheaton answered. "And I don't know anything except what I read in the papers." He hoped the others would not think him indifferent; but they were busy discussing various rumors and theories as to the route taken by the kidnappers and the amount of ransom. He threw in his own comment and speculations from time to time.

"Raridan's out chasing them," said Caldwell. "I passed him and Saxton driving like mad out Merriam Street at noon." The mention of Raridan and Saxton did not comfort Wheaton. He reflected that they had undoubtedly been to the Porter house since the alarm had been sounded, and he wondered whether his own remissness in this regard had been remarked at the

Hill. His fingers were cold as he stirred his coffee; and when he had finished he hurriedly left the room, and the men who lingered over their cigars heard the outer door close after him.

He felt easier when he got out into the cool night air. His day at the bank had been one long horror; but the clang of the cars, the lights in the streets, gave him contact with life again. He must hasten to offer his services to the Porters, though he knew that every means of assistance had been employed, and that there was nothing to do but to make inquiries. He grew uneasy as his car neared the house, and he climbed the slope of the hill like one who bears a burden. He had traversed this walk many times in the past year, in the varying moods of a lover, who one day walks the heights and is the next plunged into the depths; and latterly, since his affair with Margrave, he had known moods of conscience, too, and these returned upon him with forebodings now. If Porter had not been ill, there would never have been that interview with Margrave at the bank; and Grant would not have been at home to be kidnapped. It seemed to him that the troubles of other people rather than his own errors were bearing down the balance against his happiness.

Evelyn came into the parlor with eyes red from weeping. "Oh, have you no news?" she cried to him. He had kept on his overcoat and held his hat in his hand. Her grief stung him; a great wave of tenderness swept over him, but it was followed by a wave of terror. Evelyn wept as she tried to tell her story.

"It is dreadful, horrible!" he forced himself to say.

"But certainly no harm can come to the boy. No doubt in a few hours—"

"But he isn't strong and father is still weak—"

She threw herself in a chair and her tears broke forth afresh.

Wheaton stood impotently watching her anguish. It is a new and strange sensation which a man experiences when for the first time he sees tears in the eyes of the woman he loves.

Evelyn sprang up suddenly.

"Have you seen Warry?" she asked—"has he come back yet?"

"Nothing had been heard from them when I came up town." He still stood, watching her pityingly. "I hope you understand how sorry I am—how dreadful I feel about it." He walked over to her and she thought he meant to go. She had not heard what he said, but she thought he had been offering help.

"Oh, thank you! Everything is being done, I know. They will find him to-night, won't they? They surely must," she pleaded. Her father called her in his weakened voice to know who was there and she hurried away to him.

Wheaton's eyes followed her as she went weeping from the room, and he watched her, feeling that he might never see her again. He felt the poignancy of this hour's history,—of his having brought upon this house a hideous wrong. The French clock on the mantel struck seven and then tinkled the three quarters lingeringly. There were roses in a vase on the mantel; he had sent them to her the day before. He stood as one dazed for a minute after she had vanished. He

could hear Porter back in the house somewhere, and Evelyn's voice reassuring him. The musical stroke of the bell, the scent of the roses, the familiar surroundings of the room, wrought upon him like a pain. He stared stupidly about, as if amid a ruin that he had brought upon the place; and then he went out of the house and down the slope into the street, like a man in a dream.

While Wheaton swayed between fear and hope, the community was athrill with excitement. The probable fate of the missing boy was the subject of anxious debate in every home in Clarkson, and the whole country eagerly awaited further news of the kidnapping. Raridan and Saxton hearing early of the boy's disappearance had at once placed every known agency at work to find him. Not satisfied with the local police, they had summoned detectives from Chicago, and these were already at work. Rewards for the boy's return were telegraphed in every direction. The only clue was the slight testimony of Mrs. Whipple. She had told and re-told her story to detectives and reporters. There was only too little to tell. Grant had walked with her to the car. She had seen only one of the men that had driven up to the curb,—the one that had inquired about the entrance to Mr. Porter's grounds. She remembered that he had moved his head curiously to one side as he spoke, and there was something unusual about his eyes which she could not describe. Perhaps he had only one eye; she did not know.

Every other man in Clarkson had turned detective, and the whole city had been ransacked. Suspicion fastened itself upon an empty house in a hollow back

of the Porter hill, which had been rented by a stranger a few days before Grant Porter's disappearance; it was inspected solemnly by all the detectives but without results.

Raridan and Saxton, acting independently of the authorities in the confusion and excitement, followed a slight clue that led them far countryward. They lost the trail completely at a village fifteen miles away, and after alarming the country drove back to town. Meanwhile another message had been sent to the father of the boy stating that the ransom money could be taken by a single messenger to a certain spot in the country, at midnight, and that within forty-eight hours thereafter the boy would be returned. He was safe from pursuit, the note stated, and an ominous hint was dropped that it would be wise to abandon the idea of procuring the captive's return unharmed without paying the sum asked. Mr. Porter told the detectives that he would pay the money; but the proposed meeting was set for the third night after the abduction; the captors were in no hurry, they wrote. The crime was clearly the work of daring men, and had been carefully planned with a view to quickening the anxiety of the family of the stolen boy. And so twenty-four hours passed.

"This is a queer game," said Raridan, on the second evening, as he and John discussed the subject again in John's room at the club. "I don't just make it out. If the money was all these fellows wanted, they could make a quick touch of it. Mr. Porter's crazy to pay any sum. But they seem to want to prolong the agony."

"That looks queer," said Saxton. "There may be

something back of it; but Porter hasn't any enemies who would try this kind of thing. There are business men here who would like to do him up in a trade, but this is a little out of the usual channels."

Saxton got up and walked the floor.

"Look here, Warry, did you ever know a one-eyed man?"

"I'm afraid not, except the traditional Cyclops."

"It has just occurred to me that I have seen such a man since I came to this part of the country; but the circumstances were peculiar. This thing is queerer than ever as I think of it."

"Well?"

"It was back at the Poindexter place when I first went there. A fellow named Snyder was in charge. He had made a rats' nest of the house, and resented the idea of doing any work. He seemed to think he was there to stay. Wheaton had given him the job before I came. I remember that I asked Wheaton if it made any difference to him what I did with the fellow. He didn't seem to care and I bounced him. That was two years ago and I haven't heard of him since."

Raridan drew the smoke of a cigarette into his lungs and blew it out in a cloud.

"Who's at the Poindexter place now?"

"Nobody; I haven't been there myself for a year or more."

"Is it likely that fellow is at the bottom of this, and that he has made a break for the ranch house? That must be a good lonesome place out there."

"Well, it won't take long to find out. The thing to do is to go ourselves without saying a word to any one."

Saxton looked at his watch.

"It's half past nine. The Rocky Mountain limited leaves at ten o'clock, and stops at Great River at three in the morning. Poindexter's is about an hour from the station."

"Let's make a still hunt of it," said Warry. "The detectives are busy on what may be real clues and this is only a guess."

They rose.

"I can't imagine that fellow Snyder doing anything so dashing as carrying off a millionaire's son. He didn't look to me as if he had the nerve."

"It's only a chance, but it's worth trying."

In the lower hall they met Wheaton who was pacing up and down.

"Is there any news?" he asked, with a show of eagerness.

"No. We lost our trail at Rollins," said Raridan. "Have you heard anything?"

"Nothing so far," Wheaton replied. He uttered the "so far" bravely, as if he really might be working on clues of his own. His speculations of one moment were abandoned the next. He was building and destroying and rebuilding theories and plans of action. He was strong and weak in the same breath. He envied Raridan and Saxton their air of determined activity. He resolved to join them, to steady himself by them. He was struggling between two inclinations: one to show his last threatening note from Snyder, which was buttoned in his pocket, and boldly confess that the blow at Porter was also an indirect blow at himself; and on the other hand he held to a cowardly hope that

the boy would yet be recovered without his name appearing in the matter. He was aware that all his hopes for the future hung in the balance. He was sure that every one would soon know of his connection with the kidnapping; and yet he still tried to convince himself that he was wholly guiltless.

He was afraid of John Saxton; Saxton, he felt, probably knew the part he had played in the street railway matter. It seemed to him that Saxton must have told others; probably Saxton had Evelyn's certificate put away for use when William Porter should be restored to health; but on second thought he was not sure of this. Saxton might not know after all! This went through his mind as John and Warry stood talking to him.

"Wheaton," said Saxton, "do you remember that fellow Snyder who was in charge of the Poindexter place when I came here?"

"What—oh yes!" His hand rose quickly to his carefully tied four-in-hand and he fingered it nervously.

"You may not remember it, but he had only one eye."

"Yes, that's so," said Wheaton, as if recalling the fact with difficulty.

"And Mrs. Whipple says there was something wrong about one of the eyes of the man who accosted her and Grant at Mr. Porter's gate. What became of that fellow after he left the ranch—have you any idea?" Raridan had walked away to talk to a group of men in the reading room, leaving Saxton and Wheaton alone.

"He went West the last I knew of him," Wheaton answered, steadily.

"It has struck me that he might be in this thing.

It's only a guess, but Raridan and I thought we'd run out to the Poindexter ranch and see if it could possibly be the rendezvous of the kidnappers. It's probably a fool's errand but it won't take long, and we'll do it unofficially without saying anything to the authorities." His mind was on the plan and he looked at his watch and called to Raridan to come.

"I believe I'll go along," said Wheaton, suddenly. "We can be back by noon to-morrow," he added, conscientiously, remembering his duties at the bank.

"All right," said Warry. "We're taking bags along in case of emergencies." A boy came down carrying Saxton's suit-case. Wheaton and Raridan hurried out together to The Bachelors' to get their own things. It was a relief to Wheaton to have something to do; it was hardly possible that Snyder had fled to the ranch house; but in any event he was glad to get away from Clarkson for a few hours.

As the train drew out of the station Raridan and Saxton left Wheaton and went to the rear of their sleeper, which was the last, and stood on the observation platform, watching the receding lights of the city. The day had been warm for the season; as the air quickened into life with the movement of the train they sat down, with a feeling of relief, on the stools which the porter brought them. They had done all that they could do, and there was nothing now but to wait. The train rattled heavily through the yards at the edge of town, and the many lights of the city grew dimmer as they receded. Suddenly Raridan rose and pointed to a single star that glowed high on a hill.

"It's the light in the tower at the Porters'," he said, bending down to Saxton, "her light!"

"It's the light of all the valley," said Saxton, rising and putting his hand on his friend's shoulder. He, too, knew the light!

The train was gathering speed now; the wheels began to croon their melody of distance; one last curve, and the star of the Hill had been blotted out.

"It's like a flower in an inaccessible place on a hillside," said Raridan; and he repeated half aloud some lines of a poem that had lately haunted him:

> "'Though I be mad, I shall not wake;
> I shall not fall to common sight;
> Only the god himself may take
> This music out of my blood, this glory out of my breath,
> This lift, this rapture, this singing might,
> And love that outlasts death.'"

When they went in, Wheaton was alone in the smoking compartment and they joined him to discuss their plans for the drive to Poindexter's place.

"We'd better push right on to the ranch house as soon as we get to Great River," said Saxton. "We're due there at three o'clock. We ought to get back to take the nine o'clock train home in any event."

"And what's going to happen if we find the man there?" asked Raridan. "We want the boy and him, too, don't we?"

Wheaton sat with his eyes turned toward the window, which the darkness made opaque.

"If he's cornered he'll be glad to drop the boy and

clear out. But we want to take him home with us too, don't we, Wheaton?" asked Saxton.

"I should think we'd better make sure of the boy first," Wheaton answered. "That would be a good night's work."

The porter came to tell them that their berths were ready.

"It's hardly worth while to turn in," said Warry, yawning. "I shudder at the thought of getting up at three o'clock. "But," he added, "if we're on the right track, this time to-morrow night they'll probably be welcoming us home with brass bands and the freedom of the city. Perhaps they'll have a public meeting at the Board of Trade. Cheer up, Jim; those detectives will go out of business if we really take the boy home."

Wheaton smiled wearily; he did not relish Raridan's jesting.

"Will your imagination never rest?" growled Saxton, knocking the ashes from his pipe.

CHAPTER XXXV

SHOTS IN THE DARK

The night wind of the plain blew cold in their faces as they stepped out upon the Great River platform. There was a hint of storm in the air and clouds rode swiftly overhead. The voices of the trainmen and the throb of the locomotive, resting for its long climb mountainward, broke strangely upon the silence. A great figure muffled in a long ulster came down the platform toward the vestibule from which the trio had descended.

"Hello," called Raridan cheerily, "there's only one like that! Good morning, Bishop!"

"Good morning, gentlemen," said Bishop Delafield, peering into their faces. The waiting porter took his bags from him. "Has the boy been found yet?"

"No."

"I should have gone on home to-night if I had known that. But what are you doing here?"

Raridan told him in a few words. They were following a slight clue, and were going over to the old Poindexter place, in the hope of finding Grant Porter there. Saxton was holding a colloquy with the driver of the station hack who had come in quest of passengers, and he hurried off with the man to get a buckboard.

The conductor signaled with his lantern to go ahead, and the engine answered with a doleful peal of the bell. The porter had gathered up the bishop's things and waited for him to step aboard.

"Never mind," the bishop said to him; "I won't go to-night." The train was already moving and the bishop turned to Raridan and Wheaton. "I'll wait and see what comes of this."

"Very well," said Raridan. "We won't need our bags. We can leave them with the station agent." Wheaton stepped forward eagerly, glad to have something to do; he had not slept and was grateful for the cover of darkness which shut him out from the others.

"Gentlemen with flasks had better take them," said Warry, opening his bag. "It's a cold morning!"

"Wretchedly intemperate man," said the bishop. "Where's yours, Mr. Wheaton?"

"I haven't any," Wheaton answered.

When he went into the station, the agent eyed him curiously as he looked up from his telegraphing and nodded his promise to care for the bags. He remembered Saxton and Wheaton and supposed that they were going to Poindexter's on ranch business.

Saxton drove up to the platform with the buckboard.

"All ready," he said, and the three men climbed in, the bishop and Wheaton in the back seat and Raridan by Saxton, who drove.

"The roads out here are the worst. It's a good thing the ground's frozen."

"It's a better thing that you know the way," said Raridan. "I'm a lost child in the wilderness."

"If you lose me, Wheaton can find the way," said Saxton.

They could hear the train puffing far in the distance. Its passage had not disturbed the sleep of the little village. The lantern of the station-master flashed in the main street as he picked his way homeward. Stars could be seen beyond the flying clouds. The road lay between wire-fenced ranches, and the scattered homes of their owners were indistinguishable in the darkness of the night. A pair of ponies drew the buckboard briskly over the hard, rough road.

"How far is it?" asked the bishop.

"Five miles. We can do it in an hour," said Saxton over his shoulder.

"We'll be in Clarkson laughing at the police tomorrow afternoon if we have good luck," said Raridan. "If we've made a bad guess we'll sneak home and not tell where we've been."

The road proved to be in better condition than Saxton had expected, and he kept the ponies at their work with his whip. The rumble of the wagon rose above the men's voices and they ceased trying to talk. Raridan and Saxton smoked in silence, lighting one cigar from another. The bishop rode with his head bowed on his breast, asleep; he had learned the trick of taking sleep when and where he could.

Wheaton felt the numbing of his hands and feet in the cold night air and welcomed the discomfort, as a man long used to a particular sensation of pain welcomes a new one that proves a counter-irritant. He reviewed again the grounds on which he might have excused himself from taking this trip. Nothing, he

argued, could be more absurd than this adventure on an errand which might much better have been left to professional detectives. But it seemed a far cry back to his desk at the bank, and to the tasks there which he really enjoyed. In a few hours the daily routine would be in progress. The familiar scenes of the opening passed before him—the clerks taking their places; the slamming of the big books upon the desks as they were brought from the vault; the jingle of coin in the cages as the tellers assorted it and made ready for the day's business. He saw himself at his desk, the executive officer of the most substantial institution in Clarkson, his signature carrying the bank's pledge, his position one of dignity and authority.

But he was on William Porter's service; he pictured himself walking into the bank from a fruitless quest, but one which would attract attention to himself. If they found the boy and released him safely, he would share the thanks and praise which would be the reward of the rescuing party. He had no idea that Snyder would be captured; and he even planned to help him escape if he could do so.

They had turned off from the main highway and were well up in the branch road that ran to the Poindexter place.

"This is right, Wheaton, isn't it?" asked Saxton, drawing up the ponies.

"Yes, this is the ranch road."

They went forward slowly. The clouds were more compactly marshaled now and the stars were fewer. Suddenly Saxton brought the ponies to a stand and pointed to a dark pile that loomed ahead of them.

The Poindexter house stood forth somber in the thin starlight.

"Is that the place?" asked the bishop, now wide awake.

"That's it," said Wheaton. "This road ends there. The river's just beyond the cottonwoods. That first building was Poindexter's barn. It cost more than the court house of this county."

Saxton gave the reins to Raridan and jumped out. "No more smoking," he said, throwing away his cigar. "You stay here and I'll reconnoiter a bit." He walked swiftly toward the great barn which lay between him and the house. There was no sign of life in the place. He crept through the barb-wire fence into the corral. He had barred and padlocked the barn door on his last visit, and he satisfied himself that the fastenings had not been disturbed. There were no indications that any one had visited the place. He reasoned that if Snyder had sought the ranch house for a rendezvous he had not come afoot. Saxton was therefore disappointed to find the barn door locked and the corral empty; there was little use in looking further, he concluded; but before joining the others he resolved to make sure that the house also was empty. It was quite dark and he walked boldly up to it. The wind had risen and whistled shrilly around it; a loose blind under the eaves flapped noisily as he drew near. The great front door was closed; he pushed against it and found it securely fastened. He had brought with him a key to a rear door, and he started around the house to try it and to make sure that the house was not occupied.

At the corner toward the river, glass suddenly crunched under his feet. The windows were deeply embrasured all over the house, and he could not determine where the glass had fallen from. The windows were all intact when he left, he was sure. He drew off his glove and tiptoed to the nearest panes, ran his fingers over the smooth glass, and instantly touched a broken edge. As he was feeling the frame to discover the size of the opening, the low whinny of a horse came distinctly from within.

He stood perfectly quiet, listening, and in a moment heard the stamp of a hoof on the wooden floor of the hall. He backed off toward the drive way, which swept around in front of the house, and waited, but all remained as silent and as dark as before. He ran back through the corral to the other men, who stood talking beside the blanketed ponies.

"There's something or somebody in the house," he said. He told them of the broken window and of the sounds he had heard. "Whoever's there has no business there and we may as well turn him out. I've thought of a good many schemes for utilizing that house, but the idea of making a barn of it hadn't occurred to me."

He threw off his overcoat and tossed it into the buckboard.

"I guess that's a good idea, John," said Raridan, following his example. Wheaton stood muffled in his coat. His teeth were chattering, and he fumbled at the buttons but kept his coat on, walking toward the house with the others.

"We may have a horse thief or we may have a kid-

napper," said Saxton, who had taken charge of the party; "but in either case we may as well take him with his live stock."

"Let us not be rash," said the bishop, following the others. "He may prove an unruly customer."

"He's probably a dude tramp who rides a horse and has taken a fancy to Poindexter architecture," said Warry.

"Quiet!" admonished Saxton, who had lighted a lantern, which he concealed under his coat.

"You two watch the corners of the house," he said, indicating Raridan and Wheaton; "and you, Bishop, can stand off here, if you will, and watch for signs of light in the upper windows. The big front doors are barred on the inside, and my key opens only the back door."

"I'll go with you," said Raridan.

"Not yet, old man. You stay right here and watch until I throw open the front doors."

"But that's a foolish risk," insisted Raridan. "There may be a dozen men inside."

"That's all right, Warry. It takes only a minute to cross the hall and unbar the front doors. There's no risk about it. I'll be out in half a minute."

Raridan felt that Saxton was taking all the hazards, but he yielded, as he usually did, when Saxton was decisive, as now.

"Good luck to you, old man!" he said, slapping Saxton on the back. He patrolled the grass-plot before the house, while Saxton went to the rear.

The door opened easily, and John stepped into the lower hall. The place was pitch dark. He remembered

the position of the articles of furniture as he had left them on his last visit, and started across the hall toward the stairway, using his lantern warily. When half way, he heard the whinny of a horse which he could not see. A moment later an animal shrank away from him in the darkness and was still again. Then another horse whinnied by the window whose broken glass he had found on the outside. There were, then, two horses, from which he argued that there were at least two persons in the house. He found the doors and lifted the heavy bar that held them and drew the bolts at top and bottom. As the doors swung open slowly Raridan ran up to see if anything was wanted.

"All right," said Saxton in a low tone. "They're mighty quiet if they're here. But there's no doubt about the horses. You stay where you are and I'll explore a little."

Raridan started to follow him, but Saxton pushed him back.

"Watch the door," he said, and walked guardedly into the house again. The horses stamped fretfully as he went toward the stairway, but all was quiet above. He felt his way slowly up the stair-rail, whose heavy dust stuck to his fingers. Having gained the upper hall, he paused to take fresh bearings. His memory brought back gradually the position of the rooms. In putting out his hand he touched a picture which swung slightly on its wire and grated harshly against the rough plaster of the wall. At the same instant he heard a noise directly in front of him as of some one moving about in the chamber at the head of the stairs. The knob of a door was suddenly grasped from within.

John waited, crouched down, and drew his revolver from the side pocket of his coat. The door stuck in the frame, but being violently shaken, suddenly pulled free. The person who had opened the door stepped back into the room and scratched a match.

"Wake up there," called a voice within the room.

Saxton crept softly across the hall, settling the revolver into his hand ready for use. A man could be heard mumbling and cursing.

"Hurry up, boy, it's time we were out of this."

The owner of the voice now reappeared at the door holding a lantern; he was pushing some one in front of him. The crisis had come quickly; John Saxton knew that he had found Grant Porter; and he remembered that he was there to get the boy whether he caught his abductor or not.

The man was carrying his lantern in his right hand and pushing the boy toward the staircase with his left. As he came well out of the door, Saxton sprang up and kicked the lantern from the man's hand. At the same moment he grabbed the boy by the collar, drew him back and stepped in front of him. The lantern crashed against the wall opposite and went rolling down the stairway with its light extinguished. Saxton had dropped his own lantern and the hall was in darkness.

"Stop where you are, Snyder," said Saxton, "or I'll shoot. I'm John Saxton; you may remember me." He spoke in steady, even tones.

The lantern, rolling down the stairway, startled the horses, which stamped restlessly on the floor. The wind whistled dismally outside. He heard Snyder, as

he assumed the man to be, cautiously feeling his way toward the staircase.

"You may as well stop there," Saxton said, without moving, and holding the boy to the floor with his left hand. He spoke in sharp, even tones. "It's all right, Grant," he added in the same key to the boy, who was crying with fright. "Stay where you are. The house is surrounded, Snyder," he went on. "You may as well give in."

The man said nothing. He had found the stairway. Suddenly a revolver flashed and cracked, and the man went leaping down the stairs. The ball whistled over Saxton's head, and the boy clutched him about the legs. A bit of plaster, shaken loose by the bullet, fell from the ceiling. The noise of the revolver roared through the house.

"It's all right, Grant," Saxton said again.

The retreating man slipped and fell at the landing, midway of the stairs, and as he stumbled to his feet Saxton ran back into the room from which the fellow had emerged. He threw up the window with a crash and shouted to the men in the darkness below:

"He's coming! Get out of the way and let him go! The boy's all right!"

He hurried back into the hall where he had left Grant, who crouched moaning in the dark.

"You stay here a minute, Grant. They won't get you again," he called as he ran down the steps. One of the horses below was snorting with fright and making a great clatter with its hoofs. From the sound Saxton knew that the fleeing man was trying to mount, and as he plunged down the last half of the stairway,

the horse broke through the door with the man on his back.

"Let him go, Warry," yelled Saxton with all his lungs.

The horse was already across the threshold at a leap, his rider bending low over the animal's neck to avoid the top of the door. Raridan ran forward, taking his bearings by sounds.

"Stop!" he shouted. "Come on, Wheaton!" Wheaton was running toward him at the top of his speed; Raridan sprang in front of the horse and grabbed at the throat-latch of its bridle. The horse, surprised, and terrified by the noise, and feeling the rider digging his heels into his sides, reared, carrying Warry off his feet.

"Let go, you fool," screamed the rider. "Let go, I say!"

"Let him alone," cried Wheaton, now close at hand; but Raridan still held to the strap at the throat of the plunging horse.

The rider sat up straight on his horse and his revolver barked into the night twice in sharp succession, the sounds crashing against the house, and the flashes lighting up the struggling horse and rider, and Raridan, clutching at the bridle. Raridan's hold loosened at the first shot, and as the second echoed into the night, the horse leaped free, running madly down the road, past Bishop Delafield, who was coming rapidly toward the house. Wheaton and Saxton met in the driveway where Raridan had fallen. The flying horse could be heard pounding down the hard road.

"Warry, Warry!" called Saxton, on his knees by his

friend. "Hold the lantern," he said to Wheaton. "He's hurt." Raridan said nothing, but lay very still, moaning.

"Who's hurt?" asked the bishop coming up. Saxton had recovered his own lantern as he ran from the house. It was still burning and Wheaton turned up the wick. The three men bent over Raridan, who lay as he had fallen.

"We must get him inside," said Saxton. "The horse knocked him down."

The bishop bent over and put his arms under Raridan; and gathering him up as if the prone man had been a child, he carried him slowly toward the house. Wheaton started ahead with the lantern, but Saxton snatched it from him and ran through the doors into the hall, and back to the dining-room.

"Come in here," he called, and the old bishop followed, bearing Raridan carefully in his great arms. The others helped him to place his burden on the long table at which, in Poindexter's day, many light-hearted companies had gathered. They peered down upon him in the lantern light.

"We must get a doctor quick," said Saxton, half turning to go.

"He's badly hurt," said the old man. There was a dark stain on his coat where Raridan had lain against him. He tore open Raridan's shirt and thrust his hand underneath; and when he drew it out, shaking his gray head, it had touched something wet. Wheaton came with a pail of water, pumped by the windmill into a trough at the rear of the house. He had broken the thin ice with his hands.

"Go for a doctor," said the bishop, very quietly, nodding to Saxton; "and go fast."

Wheaton followed Saxton to the hall, where they cut loose the remaining horse. Saxton flung himself upon it, and the animal sprang into a gallop at the door. Wheaton watched the horse and rider disappear through the starlight; he wished that he could go with Saxton. He turned back with sick terror to the room where Raridan lay white and still; but Wheaton was as white as he.

The bishop had rolled his overcoat into a support for Warry's head, and with a wet handkerchief laved his temples. Wheaton stood watching him, silent, and anxious to serve, but with his powers of initiative frozen in him.

"Get the flask from his pocket," said the old man; and Wheaton drew near the table, and with a shudder thrust his hand into the pocket of Raridan's coat.

"Shall I pour some?" he asked. Raridan had moved his arms slightly and groaned as Wheaton bent close to him. Wheaton detached the cup from the bottom of the flask and poured some of the brandy into it. The bishop, motioning him to stand ready with it, raised Raridan gently, and together they pressed the silver cup to his lips.

"That will do. I think he swallowed a little," said the bishop. "Bring wood, if you can," he said, "and make a fire here." Raridan's head was growing hot under his touch, and he continued to lave it gently with the wet handkerchief. There was a shed at the back of the house where wood had been kept in the old days of the Poindexter ascendancy, and Wheaton, glad of

an excuse to get away from the prostrate figure on the long table, went stumbling through the hall to find this place. There was a terrible silence in the old house,—a silence that filled all the world, a silence that could not be broken, it seemed to him, save by some new thing of dread. There beyond the prairie, day would break soon in the town where he had striven and failed,—not the failure that proceeds from lack of opportunity or ability to gain the successes which men value most, but the failure of a man in self-mastery and courage.

He felt his soul shrivel in the few seconds that he stood at the door looking across the windy plain,—like a dreamer who turns from his dreams and welcomes the morning with the hope that his dream may not prove true. He drew the doors together and turned to go on his errand, lighting a match to get his bearings, when a sound on the stairway startled him; there was a figure there—the wan, frightened face of Grant Porter looked down at him. He had forgotten the boy, whom Saxton had left in the hall above. Grant shrank back on the stairs, not recognizing him. It seemed to Wheaton that there was something of loathing in the boy's movement, and that always afterward people would shrink from him.

"Is that you, Grant?" he asked. The boy did not answer. "It's all right, Grant," he added, trying to throw some kindness into his voice. "You'd better stay upstairs, until—we're ready to go."

The boy turned and stole back up the stairway, and Wheaton, encouraged by the sound of his own voice,

brought wood and kindled it with some straw in the dining-room fireplace.

"Let us try the brandy again," said the bishop. Again Wheaton poured it, and they forced a little between the lips of the stricken man. Raridan's face, as Wheaton touched it with his fingers, was warm; he had expected to find it cold; he had a feeling that the man lying there must be dead. If only help would come, Raridan might live! He would accept everything else, but to be a murderer—to have lured a man to his doom! The bishop did not speak to him save now and then a word in a low tone, to call attention to some change in Raridan, or to ask help in moving him. The dry wood burned brightly in the fireplace and lighted the room. The bishop asked the time.

"He could hardly go and come in less than two hours," said Wheaton. He lifted his head.

"They are coming now." The short patter of pony hoofs was heard and he went into the hall to open the doors. Two horsemen were just turning into the corral. Saxton had found the one doctor of the village at home,—a young man trained in an eastern hospital but already used to long, rough rides over the prairies. The two men threw themselves to the ground, and let their ponies run loose. Saxton did not speak to Wheaton, who followed him and the doctor into the house.

"Has he been conscious at all?" asked the doctor.

The bishop shook his head. The doctor was already busy with his examination, and the three men stood and watched him silently. Saxton stepped for-

ward and helped, when there was need, to turn the wounded man and to strip away his clothing. The skilled fingers of the surgeon worked swiftly, producing shining instruments and sponges as he needed them, from the blue lining of his pea-jacket. Suddenly he paused and bent down close to the stricken man's heart. He poured more brandy into the silver cup and Saxton lifted Warry while the liquor was forced between his lips. The doctor stood up then and put his finger on Raridan's wrist. He had not spoken and his face was very grave. Saxton touched his arm.

"Is there nothing more you can do now?" The doctor shook his head, but bent again over Raridan, who gave a deep sigh and opened his eyes.

"John," he said in a whisper as he closed them again wearily. The doctor put Warry's hand down gently, and the others, at a glance from him, drew nearer.

"John," he repeated. His voice was stronger. The white light of dawn was struggling now against the flame of the fireplace. John stood on one side of the table, the doctor on the other. The old bishop's tall figure rose majestically by the head of the dying man. Wheaton alone hung aloof, but his eyes were riveted on Warry Raridan's face.

"It was another—another of my foolish chances," said Warry faintly and slowly, the words coming hard; but all in the room could hear. He looked from one to another, and seemed to know who the doctor was and why he was there.

"The boy's safe and well. We got what we came for. Just once—just once,—I got what I came for. It

wasn't fair—in the dark that way—" His voice failed and the doctor gave him more brandy. He lay very still for several minutes, with his eyes closed, while the three men stood as they had been, save that the surgeon now kept his finger on Warry's wrist.

"I never—quite arrived—quite—arrived," he went on, with his eyes on the old bishop, as if this were something that he would understand; "but you must forgive all that." He smiled in a patient, tired way.

"You have been a good man, Warry, there's nothing that can trouble you."

"I was really doing better, wasn't I, John?" he went on, still smiling. "You had helped,—you two,"—he looked from his young friend to the older one, with the intentness of his near-sighted gaze. "Tell them"—his eyes closed and his voice sank until it was almost inaudible,—"tell them at the hill—Evelyn—the light of all—of all—the year."

The doctor had put down Warry's wrist and turned away. The dawn-wind sweeping across the prairie shook the windows in the room and moaned far away in the lonely house. The bishop's great hand rested gently on the dying man's head; his voice rose in supplication,—the words coming slowly, as if he remembered them from a far-off time:

Unto God's gracious mercy and protection we commit thee. Saxton dropped to his knees, and a sob broke from him. *The Lord bless thee, and keep thee. The Lord make his face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee.* The old man's voice was very low, and sank to a whisper. *The Lord lift up his countenance*

upon thee and give thee peace, both now and evermore.

No one moved until the doctor put his head down to Warry's heart to listen. Then Wheaton watched him with fascinated eyes as he gathered up his instruments, which shone cold and bright in the gray light of the morning.

CHAPTER XXXVI

HOME THROUGH THE SNOW

There was much to do, and John Saxton had been back and forth twice between the ranch house and the village before the sun had crept high into the heavens. The little village had been slow to grasp the fact of the tragedy at its doors which had already carried its name afar. There was much to do and yet it was so pitifully little after all! Warry Raridan was dead, and eager men were scouring the country for his murderer; but John Saxton sat in the room where Warry had died. It seemed to John that the end had come of all the world. He sharpened his grief with self-reproach that he had been a party to an exploit so foolhardy: they should never have attempted a midnight descent upon an unknown foe; and yet it was Raridan's own plan.

It was like Warry, too, and the thought turned John's memory into grooves that time was to deepen. This was the only man who had ever brought him friendship. The first night at the club in Clarkson, when Raridan had spoken to him, came back, vivid in all its details. He recalled with a great ache in his heart their talk there in the summer twilight; the charm that he had felt first that night, and how Warry had grown more and more into his life, and brightened it.

He could not, in the fullness of his sorrow, see himself again walking alone the ways they had known together. Even the town seemed to him in these early hours an unreal place; it was not possible that it lay only a few hours distant, with its affairs going on uninterruptedly; nor could he realize that he would himself take up there the threads of his life that now seemed so hopelessly broken.

Saxton had ministered to the boy Grant with characteristic kindness. Grant knew now of Warry's death, and this, with his own sharp experiences, had unnerved him. He clung to Saxton, and John soothed him until he slept, in one of the upper chambers.

Wheaton stood suddenly in the door, and beckoned to Saxton, who went out to him. They had exchanged no words since that moment when the old bishop's prayer had stilled the room where Warry Raridan died. Through the events of the morning hours, Wheaton had been merely a spectator of what was done; Saxton had hardly noticed him, and glancing at Wheaton now, he was shocked at the look of great age that had come upon him.

"I want to speak to you a minute,—you and Bishop Delafield," said Wheaton. The bishop was pacing up and down in the outer hall, which had been quietly cleaned and put in order by men from the village. Wheaton led the way to the room once used as the ranch office.

"Will you sit down, gentlemen?" He spoke with so much calmness that the others looked at him curiously. The bishop and Saxton remained standing, and Wheaton repeated, sharply, "Will you sit down?" The

two men sat down side by side on the leather-covered bench that ran around the room, and Wheaton stood up before them; and so they met together here, the three men left of the four who had come to the ranch house in the early morning.

"I have something to say to you, before you—before we go," he said. Their silence seemed to confuse him for a moment, but he regained his composure. He looked from Saxton to the bishop, who nodded, and he went on:

"The man who killed Warry Raridan was my brother," he said, and waited.

Saxton started slightly; his numbed senses quickened under Wheaton's words, and in a flash he saw the explanation of many things.

"He was my brother," Wheaton went on quietly. "He had wanted money from me. I had refused to help him. He carried away Grant Porter thinking to injure me in that way. It was that, I think, as much as the hope of getting a large sum for the boy's return."

"But—" began the bishop.

"There are many questions that will occur to you—and to others," Wheaton resumed, with an assurance that transformed him for the moment. He spoke as of events in ages past which had no relation to himself. "There are many things that might have been different, that would have been different, if I had not been"—he hesitated and then finished abruptly—"if I had not been a coward."

A great quiet lay upon the house; the two men remained sitting, and Wheaton stood before them with his arms crossed, the bishop and Saxton watching him,

and Wheaton looking from one to the other of his companions. Contempt and anger were rising in John Saxton's heart; but the old bishop waited calmly; this was not the first time that a troubled soul had opened its door to him.

"Go on," he said, kindly.

"My brother and I ran away from the little Ohio town where we were born. Our father was a harness maker. I hated the place. I think I hated my father and mother." He paused, as we do sometimes when we have suddenly spoken a thought which we have long carried in our hearts but have never uttered. The words had elements of surprise for James Wheaton, and he waited, weighing his words and wishing to deal justly with himself. "My brother was a bad boy; he had never gone to school, as I had; he had several times been guilty of petty stealing. I joined him once in a theft; we were arrested, but he took the blame and was punished, and I went free. I am not sure that I was any better, or that I am now any better than he is. But that is the only time I ever stole."

Saxton remembered that Warry had once said of James Wheaton that he would not steal.

"I wanted to be honest; I tried my best to do right. I never expected to do as well as I have—I mean in business and things like that. Then after all the years in which I had not seen anything of my brother he came into the bank one day as a tramp, begging, and recognized me. At first I helped him. I sent him here; you will remember the man Snyder you found here when you came," turning to Saxton. "I knew

you would not keep him. There was nothing else that I could do for him. I had new ambitions," his voice fell and broke, "there were—there were other things that meant a great deal to me—I could not have him about. It was he who assaulted me one night at Mr. Porter's two years ago, when you," he turned to the bishop, "came up and drove him away. After that I gave him money to leave the country and he promised to stay away; but he began blackmailing me again, and I thought then that I had done enough for him and refused to help him any more. When Grant Porter disappeared I knew at once what had happened. He had threatened—but there is something—something wrong with me!"

These last words broke from him like a cry, and he staggered suddenly and would have fallen if Saxton had not sprung up and caught him. He recovered quickly and sat down on the bench.

"Let us drop this now," said Saxton, standing over him; "it's no time—"

"There's something wrong with me," said Wheaton huskily, without heeding, and Saxton drew back from him. "I was a vain, cowardly fool. But I did the best I could," he passed his hand over his face, and his fingers crept nervously to his collar, "but it wasn't any use! It wasn't any use!" He turned again to the bishop. "I heard you preach a sermon once. It was about our opportunities. You said we must live in the open. I had never thought of that before," and he looked at the bishop with a foolish grin on his face. He stood up suddenly and extended his arms. "Now I want you to tell me what to do. I want to be pun-

ished! This man's blood is on my hands. I want to be punished!" And he sank to the floor in a heap, repeating, as if to himself, "I want to be punished!"

There are two great crises in the life of a man. One is that moment of disclosure when for the first time he recognizes some vital weakness in his own character. The other comes when, under stress, he submits this defect to the eyes of another. James Wheaton hardly knew when he had realized the first, but he was conscious now that he had passed the second. It had carried him like a high tide to a point of rest; but it was a point of helplessness, too.

"It isn't for us to punish you," the bishop began, "and I do not see that you have transgressed any law."

"That is it! that is it! It would be easier! I would to God I had!" moaned Wheaton. John turned away. James Wheaton's face was not good to see.

"Yes, it would be easier," the bishop continued. "Man's penalties are lighter than God's. I can see that in going back to Clarkson many things will be hard for you—"

"I can't! Oh, I can't!" He still crouched on the floor, with his arms extended along the bench.

"But that is the manly thing for you. If you have acted a cowardly part, now is the time for you to change, and you must change on the field of battle. I can imagine the discomfort of facing your old friends; that you will suffer keen humiliation; that you may have to begin again; but you must do it, my friend, if you wish to rise above yourself, and you may depend upon my help."

The old man had spoken with emphasis, but with

great gentleness. He turned to Saxton, wishing him to speak.

"The bishop is right. You must go back with us, Wheaton." But he did not say that he would help him. John Saxton neither forgot nor forgave easily. He did not see in this dark hour what he had to do with James Wheaton's affairs. But the Bishop of Clarkson went over to James Wheaton and lifted him up; it was as though he would make the physical act carry a spiritual aid with it.

"We can talk of this to better purpose when we get home," he said. "You are broken now and see your future darkly; but I say to you that you can be restored; there's light and hope ahead for you. If there is any meaning in my ministry it is that with the help of God a man may come out of darkness into the light again."

There was a moment's silence. Wheaton sat bent forward on the bench, with his elbows on his knees and his face in his hands.

"They are waiting for us," said Saxton.

A special train was sent to Great River, and the little party waited for it on the station platform, surrounded by awed villagers, who stood silent in the presence of death and a mystery which they but dimly comprehended. Officers of the law from Clarkson came with the train and surrounded Bishop Delafield, Wheaton and Saxton as they stood with Grant Porter by the rude bier of Warry Raridan. The men answered many questions and the sheriff of the county took the detectives away with him. Margrave had sent his private

car, and the returning party were huddled in one end of it, save John Saxton, who sat alone with the body of Warry Raridan. The train was to go back immediately, but it waited for the west-bound express which followed it and passed the special here. There was a moment's confusion as the special with its dark burden was switched into a siding to allow the regular train to pass. Then the special returned to the main track and began its homeward journey.

John sat with his arms folded, sunk into his great-coat, and watched the gray landscape through the snow that was falling fast. The events of the night seemed like a hideous dream. It was an inconceivable thing that within a few hours so dire a calamity could have fallen. The very nearness of the city to which they were bound added to the unreality of all that had happened. But there the dark burden lay; and the snow fell upon the gray earth and whitened it, as if to cleanse and remake it and blot out its dolor and dread. The others left Saxton alone; he was nearer than they; but late in the afternoon, as they approached the city, Captain Wheelock came in and touched him on the shoulder; Bishop Delafield wished to see him. John rose, giving Wheelock his place, and went back to where the old man sat staring out at the snow. He beckoned Saxton to sit down by him.

"Where's Wheaton?" the bishop asked.

John looked at him and at the other men who sat in silence about the car. He went to one of them and repeated the bishop's question, but was told that Wheaton was not on the train. He had been at the station and had come aboard the car with the rest; but

he must have returned to the station and been left. John remembered the passing of the west-bound express, and went back and told the bishop that Wheaton had not come with them. The old man shook his head and turned again to the window and the flying panorama of the snowy landscape. John sat by him, and neither spoke until the train's speed diminished at a crossing on the outskirts of Clarkson. Then suddenly, hot at heart and with tears of sorrow and rage in his eyes, Saxton said, so that only the bishop could hear:

"He's a damned coward!"

The Bishop of Clarkson stared steadily out upon the snow with troubled eyes.

CHAPTER XXXVII

"A PECULIAR BRICK"

It was Fenton who most nearly voiced the public sorrow at the death of Warrick Raridan. His address at the memorial meeting of the Clarkson Bar Association surprised the community, which knew Fenton only as a corporation lawyer who rarely made speeches, even to juries. Fenton put into words the general appraisement of Warry Raridan—his social grace and charm, his wit and variety. People who hardly knew that Raridan had been a lawyer were surprised that the leader of the Clarkson bar dwelt upon his instinctive grasp of legal questions, "the thoroughness of his research and the clarity and force with which he presented legal propositions." Raridan was a lawyer with an imagination, Fenton said, thus seizing what had been considered a weakness of character and making it count as an element of strength. Fenton was not given to careless praise, and what he said of Raridan had much to do with formulating the opinion that was to pass into Clarkson history. The last few months of Warry's life had won him this eulogy—the work which he had done for Evelyn. Fenton had learned to know him well after the appointment of Saxton as receiver. He had thrown a number of important ques-

tions to Warry to investigate, and he had been amazed at his young lieutenant's capacity and industry. He did not know that a woman had been the inspiration of this work; he thought that it proceeded from Saxton's influence and the pleasure Warry found in labor that brought him near his friend.

It was not alone Warry's death, but the sharp, tragic manner of it, so wretchedly inconsonant with his life, that grieved and shocked the community. But this too had its compensations; for many read into his life now a recklessness and daring which it had lacked. They spoke of him as though he had been a young soldier who had fallen at the first skirmish, without having been tried in battle; all spoke of his promise and mourned that his life had been harvested before he had finished sowing. On every hand his good deeds were recounted; many unknown witnesses rose to tell of acts of generosity and kindness which would never have been disclosed in his lifetime. Those who had really known him no longer lamented his erratic habits. They now magnified his talents; and his whimsical, fanciful ways they attributed to genius.

It was much easier to account for Raridan than to explain Wheaton. Most of the people of Clarkson did not understand his flight, if he had neither stolen the bank's money nor killed Warry Raridan. There was a disposition for a time to reject the story of the tragedy at the Poindexter ranch house as it had been given out by Bishop Delafield and John Saxton; but the bishop's word in the matter was final; he was not a man to conceal the truth. Those who had seen most of Wheaton were the most puzzled. The men who re-

mained at The Bachelors' were stunned by the whole affair, but in particular they failed to grasp the curious phase presented by Wheaton's connection—or lack of connection—with it. They expected him to return, and even discussed what should be their attitude toward him if he came back. As the days passed and nothing was heard, they gradually ceased talking of him; but by silent assent no one took the seat he had occupied at their table. When presently the landlord sent Wheaton's things to be stored in the cellar, and new men appeared in the places of Raridan and Wheaton, they exchanged the oblong table for a round one, to take away whatever ill luck might follow the places of the lost members of their board.

The chief shock to William Porter was a shock to his pride. He had trusted Wheaton as implicitly as he trusted any man, and while his trust at all times had limitations, he had extended these beyond precedent in James Wheaton's case. Saxton and Bishop Delafield had gone to him as soon as possible, with Fenton. It was important for Porter to understand exactly what had occurred at the Poindexter ranch house. The newspapers had now announced Wheaton's flight; it was natural that the bank should fall under suspicion, and that all of Porter's interests should be jeopardized. A cashier implicated in some way in a murder, and in full flight for parts unknown, created a situation which could not be ignored. But Porter met the issue squarely and sanely.

The expert accountants who were put to work on the bank's books made an absolutely clean report, and the

minutest scrutiny of the securities of the bank proved everything intact. Wheaton had been a master of order and system. The searching investigation of experts and directors revealed nothing that was not creditable to the missing cashier.

"Well, sir," said Porter, "you've got me. I guess Jim was crooked some way, but he didn't do us up. I guess there's nothing we can say against him."

"His case is unusual," said Fenton. "I think we'd better leave it to the psychologists."

It was necessary to fill Wheaton's place, and while they were casting about for a cashier Porter and Thompson received offers from a Chicago syndicate for their stock in the bank. The offer was advantageous; both of the founders were old and both were in broken health. They debated long what they should do. The bank was a child of their own creating; Porter was particularly loath to part with it; but Evelyn, to whom he brought the matter in a new spirit of dependence on her, finally prevailed upon him. They closed with the offer of the syndicate, parting with the control but remaining in the directorate. Porter had other interests that required his attention, chief among which was the Traction Company; and after the bank question had been determined, he gave himself to a careful study of its affairs.

"I guess this thing ain't so terribly rotten after all," he said one day, at a conference with Saxton and Fenton. The earnings were steadily increasing.

"No, it's making a showing now, and unless you want to keep it for a long run you had better sell it before you get into a strike or a row with the city au-

thorities or something like that, to spoil it. And I fancy that Saxton's making a showing that the next fellow can't beat. One thing's sure," said Fenton, "some extensions and improvements have got to be made the coming summer, and they will take money."

"Well, we won't make them," Porter declared. "We'll reorganize and bond and get out."

While the newspapers, and the judge of the court to whom he reported, praised Saxton, Porter never praised him. It was not his way; but Fenton took care that Porter should understand fully the value of Saxton's services. Praise had not often been John Saxton's portion, and he was not seriously troubled by Porter's apparent indifference. He was not working for William Porter, he told himself, at times when Porter's attitude annoyed him; he was working for the United States Circuit Court; and he went on doing his duty as he saw it. He was, however, anxious to be relieved, but Fenton begged him to remain through the reorganization. He liked Saxton and admired his steady persistence. Together they worked out the problem of the proposed new company, and managed it with so much tact and self-effacement that Porter believed all their suggestions to have originated with himself.

"It's simpler that way," said Fenton, speaking to Saxton one day of the necessity of this method of procedure. "He's a perfect brick, and he'll like us a lot better if we let him think he's doing all the work."

"He is a brick all right," said John thoughtfully, "but he's a peculiar brick."

CHAPTER XXXVIII

OLD PHOTOGRAPHS

In the days that followed, John Saxton knew again the heartache and loneliness which he had known before Warry Raridan came into his life. He had lost the first real friend he had ever had, and his days were once more empty of light and cheer. His work still engrossed him, but it failed to bring him the happiness which he had found in it when he and Warry discussed its perplexities together. His memory sought its old ruts again; the hardship and failure of his years in Wyoming were like fresh wounds. He talked to no one except Bishop Delafield, who had reasoned him out of his self-indictment for Warry's death. He did not know that his own part in the recovery of Grant Porter, as Bishop Delafield described it, was touched with a fine and generous courage, and he would have resented it if he had known.

Warry was constantly in his thoughts; but he thought much of Evelyn too; through all the years to come, he told himself, he would remember them and they would be his ideals. Echoes of the gossip which connected Warry's name and Evelyn's reached him, and he felt no shock that such surmises should be afloat. Warry and he had understood each other; they had talked of

Evelyn frequently; Warry had come to him often with the confidences of a despairing lover, and John had encouraged and consoled him. He predicted his ultimate success; it had always seemed to him an inevitable thing that Warry and Evelyn should marry.

Three weeks passed before he saw her, and then he went to her with an excuse for his visit in his mind and heart. Warry had left a will in which the bulk of his property—and it was a respectable fortune—was given for the endowment of a hospital for children. Saxton was named as executor and as a trustee of the fund thus set apart. Warry had never mentioned the matter to any one; he had probably never thought of it very seriously, and John wished to talk to Evelyn about it.

It seemed strange that the Porter drawing-room was the same, when everything else had changed; he had not been there since the afternoon when he walked home with Evelyn through the cold. He despised himself for that now; it was an act of disloyalty to Warry; but he would now be more loyal to the dead than he had been to the living.

As they talked together he saw no change in her; and he felt himself wondering what manner of change it was that he had expected to find. He had heard of people who aged suddenly with grief, but Evelyn was the same, save for a greater composure, a more subdued note of manner and voice. She bent forward in her deep interest in what he told her of Warry's bequest. He wished her help, and asked for it as if it were her right to give it. Surely no one had a better claim than she, he thought.

"It is so like Warry," she said. "It will be a beautiful memorial, and there is enough to do it very handsomely."

"He liked things to be done well," said John. He marveled that she could speak of it so quietly. Failure and grief possessed his eyes, and Evelyn was conscious of a deepening of the pathos she had always seen and felt in him, as he sat talking of his dead friend. She pitied him, and was obedient to his evident wish to talk of Warry.

John spoke of Warry's last photographs, and Evelyn went and brought a number which he had never seen. Several of them dated back to Warry's boyhood. They were odd and interesting—boyish pictures which the spectacles made appear preternaturally old. One of these, that John liked particularly, Evelyn asked him to take, and his face lighted with pleasure when she made it plain that she wished him to have it. She told of some of Warry's pranks in their childhood, and they laughed over them with guarded mirth.

"It was wonderful that so many kinds of people were fond of Warry," said Evelyn. "He never tried to please, and yet no man in town ever had so many friends."

"It's like genius, I suppose," said John. "It's something in people that wins admiration. No one can define it or explain it. I think, though," he added in a lower tone, "I know how it was in my own case. I had always wanted a friend like him to take me out of myself and help me; but a man like Warry had never come my way before; and if he had he would probably have been in a hurry."

He laughed and then was very grave. "But Warry always had time for me." At his last words he looked up at her and saw tears shining in her eyes.

"Oh, forgive me—forgive me!" he cried. "It must—I know it must hurt you to talk of him. But I couldn't help it. I thought you must understand what he meant to me. Dear old Warry!"

He held in his hand the little card photograph she had given him, and he rose and thrust it into his pocket.

"He was a charming, gentle spirit," said Evelyn. "It will mean a great deal to us that we knew him. You meant a great deal to him, Mr. Saxton. You helped him. It was—" She halted, confused, and had evidently intended to say more. The color suddenly mounted to her face. She did not offer him her hand which he had stepped forward to take, and he dropped his own, which he had half extended.

"Good night." Her eyes followed him to the hall.

On his way home—he still lived at the club—John reviewed, sentence by sentence, his talk with Evelyn. He had not expected her to speak so frankly of Warry; but, he told himself, it was like her. He touched the photograph she had given him, and held it up as he passed under an arc lamp to be sure of it. He was surprised that she had given it to him; he did not think a girl would give away a rare picture of a dead lover, which must have a peculiar sacredness for her. Then he was angry with himself for a thought that criticised her. She had given it to him because he was Warry's friend!

When he reached his room he put the photograph of Warry on his table and took another similar card from a drawer. It was the little picture of Evelyn which he

had often seen on Warry's dressing-table. It showed her standing by a tall chair; her hair hung in long braids. It was very girlish and quaint; but it was unmistakably Evelyn.

Warry in his will had directed that John should have such of his personal effects as he might choose; the remainder he was to destroy or sell. John chose a few of the books that Warry had liked best, and the picture. He put it down now beside the photograph of Warry. They bore the name of the same photographer, and had probably been taken in the same year. He lighted his pipe and tramped back and forth across the floor, occasionally stopping at his desk to look at the cards carefully. He had no right to Evelyn Porter's picture, he told himself. He was taking advantage of his dead friend's kindness to appropriate it. He would not destroy it; he would give it to some one—to Mrs. Whipple, to Evelyn herself! Yes, it should be to Evelyn; and having reached this conclusion, he put the two pictures away together and went to bed.

The next day he was called away unexpectedly to Colorado to close a sale of the Neponset Trust Company's interest in the irrigation company. The call came inopportunely, as the plans for the reorganization of the Traction Company were not yet perfected; but the matter was urgent, and Fenton told him to go. There was not time, he assured himself, to return the photograph before leaving, so he carried both the little cards away with him, with a half-formed intention of sending Evelyn's to her from Denver; but when he returned to Clarkson he still carried the photographs in his pocket.

CHAPTER XXXIX

"IT IS CRUEL"

"It is cruel of them to say it!"

Evelyn was at the Whipples'. It was a morning in May. Spring possessed the valley. The long vistas across the hills were closing as the leaves crept into the trees again. The windows were open, and the snowy curtains swayed to the wind. Lilacs again in the Whipples' dooryard bloomed, and the general's young cherry trees were white with blossoms. It was not well that any one should be heavy of heart on such a morning, but Evelyn Porter was not happy. She sat leaning forward with both hands resting on the ivory ball of her parasol. A querulous note crept into her voice. It is strange how the heartache to which the face never yields finds a ready prey in the voice.

"It is cruel of them to say it!"

"But it is natural too, dear," said Mrs. Whipple. "Many people must have wondered about you and Warry. If it will help any, I will confess that I wondered a good deal myself. Now you won't mind, will you? It seems hard, now that he has gone—but before—before, it was not unreasonable!"

"But the gossip! I don't care for myself, but it is cruel to him, to his memory, that this should be said.

If it had been true; if—if we had been engaged, it would not be so wretched; but this—oh, it hurts me!" She lay back in her chair. Her eyes were over-bright; her words ended in a wail.

Mrs. Whipple felt that Evelyn's view of the matter was absurd. If the people of Clarkson were trying to read an element of romance into Warry Raridan's death, they were certainly working no injury to his memory. Such a view of the matter was fantastic. Evelyn did not know that another current story coupled her name with that of James Wheaton, who was spoken of in some quarters, and even guardedly in newspapers outside of Clarkson, as Raridan's rival for the affections of William Porter's daughter. Mrs. Whipple had shuddered hourly since the tragedy at Poindexter's when she remembered how much Wheaton had been about with Evelyn. He had been with her almost as much as Warry. Mrs. Whipple recalled the carnival of two years ago with shame. Her heart smote her as she watched the girl. It was a hideous thing that evil should have crept so near her life. Wheaton had been a strange species of reptile among them all.

"Poor dear! You must not take it so!" The silence had grown oppressive. It was incumbent upon her to comfort the girl if she could.

"It isn't a thing that you can help, child. There's no way of stopping gossip; and if they persist in saying such things, they will have to say them, that's all. If you wish—if it will help you any, I will refute it when I can—I mean among our friends only."

"Oh, no! That would make it worse. Please don't say anything!"

Mrs. Whipple did not accept solicitude for Warry's memory as a sufficient explanation of Evelyn's troubles; nor was it like Evelyn to complain of gossip about herself. The girl had naturally felt Warry's death deeply; she made no secret of her great fondness for him. But if Evelyn had really cared for Warry with more than a friendly regard, she would never have come to her in this way. She assumed this hypothesis as she made irrelevant talk with the girl. Then she thought of Wheaton; if Wheaton had been the one Evelyn had cared for—if Warry had been the friend and he the lover! She gave rein for a moment to this idea. Perhaps Evelyn followed the man now with sympathy—the thought was repulsive; she rejected it instantly with self-loathing for having harbored an idea that wronged Evelyn so miserably.

"What father feels is that his mistake in Wheaton argues a great weakness in himself," Evelyn was saying. She was more tranquil now. Mrs. Whipple noticed that she spoke Wheaton's name without hesitation; she had dropped the prefix of respect, as every one had. We have a way of eliminating it in speaking of men who are markedly good or bad.

"Father takes it very hard. He isn't naturally morbid, but he seems to feel as if he had been responsible—Grant being back of it all. But we didn't know those men were going out there—we knew nothing until it was all over!" The girl spoke as if she too felt the responsibility. "And he thinks he ought to have known about Wheaton—ought to have seen what kind of man he was!"

Evelyn's blue foulard was beyond criticism and it

matched her parasol perfectly; the girl had never been prettier. Mrs. Whipple inwardly apologized for having admitted the thought of Wheaton to her mind.

"We can all accuse ourselves in the same way. To think of it—that he has actually passed tea in this very room!" Her shrug of loathing was so real that Evelyn shuddered.

Then Mrs. Whipple laughed, so suddenly that it startled Evelyn.

"It's dreadful! horrible!" Mrs. Whipple continued, "to find that a person you have really looked upon with liking—perhaps with admiration—has been all along eaten with a moral leprosy. If it weren't for poor Warry we should be able to look upon it as a profitable experience. There aren't many like Wheaton. The bishop thinks we ought to be lenient in dealing with him—that he was not really so bad; that he was simply weak—that his weakness was a kind of disease of his moral nature. But I can't see it that way myself. The man ought not to go scot-free. He ought to be punished. But it's too intangible and subtle for the law to take hold of."

Evelyn had picked up her card-case. It was a pretty trifle of silver and leather; she tapped the handle of her parasol with it. Something had occurred to Mrs. Whipple when she laughed a moment before, and seeing that Evelyn was about to rise, she said casually:

"Mr. Saxton doesn't share the bishop's gentle charity toward Wheaton." She watched Evelyn as she applied the test. The girl did not raise her eyes at once. She bent over the parasol meditatively, still tapping the handle with the card-case.

"What does Mr. Saxton say?" Evelyn asked, dropping the trinket into her lap and looking at her friend vaguely, as people do who ask questions out of courtesy rather than from honest curiosity.

"Mr. Saxton says that Wheaton's a scoundrel—a damned scoundrel, to be literal. He told the general so, here, a few nights ago. He seemed very bitter. You know what close friends he and Warry were!"

"Yes; it was an ideal kind of friendship. They were devoted to each other," said Evelyn very earnestly; there was a little cry in her voice as she spoke. It was as though happiness, struggling against sorrow, had almost gained the mastery.

"It's fine to see that in men. I sometimes think that friendships among them have a quality that ours lack. I think Mr. Saxton is very lonely. I wasn't here when he called, but the general saw him. You know the general likes him particularly."

"Yes."

"You and he both knew and appreciated Warry."

Evelyn had grasped her parasol, and she took up the card-case again. Mrs. Whipple was half ashamed of herself; but she was also convinced. She took another step.

"Of course you see him; he must be reaching out to all Warry's friends in his loneliness."

Mrs. Whipple's powers of analysis were keen, but there were times when they failed her. She did not know that her question hurt Evelyn Porter; and she did not know that Evelyn had seen John Saxton but once since the day they all stood by Warry's grave.

Mrs. Whipple disapproved of herself as she followed Evelyn to the door. She had no business to pry into the girl's secrets in this way; the sweep of the foulard touched her, and she sought to placate her conscience by burying her new-found knowledge under less guilty information.

Evelyn spoke of the place which her father had bought at Orchard Lane, on the North Shore, and told Mrs. Whipple that she and the general were expected to spend a month there.

"You will be away all summer, I suppose. It's fine that your father has taken the course he has. He might have felt that he must stay at home closer than ever, to look after his interests."

"It's more for Grant than for himself," said Evelyn; "but he realizes too that he must take care of himself."

"That's a good deal gained for a Western business man. It's been a terrible year for you, dear,—your father's illness and these other things. You need rest."

She took the girl's cheeks in her hands and kissed her, and Evelyn went out into the spring afternoon and walked homeward over the sloping streets.

Mrs. Whipple pondered long after Evelyn left. Evelyn was not happy. She was not mourning a dead lover, nor one whose life was eclipsed in shame; but another man disturbed her peace, and Mrs. Whipple wondered why. She was still pondering when the general came in. He had been out to take the air, and after he had brought his syphon from the ice-box he was ready to talk.

"Evelyn has been here," said Mrs. Whipple. "She

asked us to come to them for a visit. You know Mr. Porter has bought a place on the North Shore."

"It sounds like a miracle. Jim Wheaton didn't live in vain if he's responsible for that."

They debated their invitation, which Mrs. Whipple had already accepted, she explained, from a sense of duty to Evelyn. The general said he supposed he would have to go, with a show of reluctance that was wholly insincere and to which Mrs. Whipple gave no heed. They were asked for July. They discussed the old friends whom they would probably see while they were East, until the summer loomed pleasant before them, and then the talk came back to Evelyn.

"The child doesn't look well," said Mrs. Whipple.

"I shouldn't think she would, with all the row and rumpus they've been having in their family. Abductions and murders and abscondings at one's door are not conducive to light-heartedness."

"She's annoyed by all this gossip about her and Warry. She doesn't know that Wheaton is supposed to have taken more than a friendly interest in her."

"Well, I wouldn't tell her that, if I were you—if Wheaton didn't."

"Of course he didn't!"

"Well, he didn't then." The syphon hissed into the glass.

"Evelyn and Warry weren't engaged," said Mrs. Whipple. The general held up the glass and watched the gas bubbling to the top.

"It's just as well that way," he said. "It saves her a lot of heartache."

"That's what I think," said Mrs. Whipple promptly.

In such conversations as this she usually combated the general's opinions. An exception to the rule was so noteworthy that he began to pay serious attention.

"They weren't, but they might have been. Is that it?"

"No. Anything might have been. There's no use speculating about what can't be now."

"I suppose that's true. Well?"

"Something is troubling Evelyn, and I'll tell you what I think it is. I think it was Saxton all along."

"I always told you he was a good fellow. He's really shown me some attentions, and that's more than most of the young men have done, except Warry. Warry was nice to everybody. But Saxton's alive and hearty and hasn't skipped for parts unknown. Why is Evelyn mourning?" He shook the glass until the ice tinkled pleasantly.

"I don't know. Maybe—maybe he doesn't understand!"

"He isn't stupid," said the general, thoughtfully.

"Of course he isn't."

"It may be that he isn't interested—that she doesn't appeal to him. Such a thing is conceivable."

"No, it isn't! Of course it isn't!"

The general laughed at her scornful rejection of the idea.

"You tell me, then."

"What I think is, that there is some reason—perhaps some point of honor with him—that keeps him away from her. He was Warry's friend. He was nearer Warry in his last years than any one. Don't

you think that something of that sort may be the matter?"

The general was greatly amused, and he laughed so that Mrs. Whipple's own dignity was shaken.

"Amelia," he said, "your analytical powers are too sharp for this world. You're shaving it down pretty fine, it seems to me. I wish you'd tell me what you base that on."

"I'm not basing it; but it seems so natural that that should be the way."

The syphon gurgled harshly and sputtered, and the general put it down sadly.

"Now that you've solved the riddle in your own mind, how are you going to proceed? You'd better not try army tactics on a civilian job. Saxton isn't a second lieutenant, to be regulated by the commandant's wife."

"He's a dear!" declared Mrs. Whipple irrelevantly. "If Evelyn Porter wants him, she's going to have him."

"Oh, Lord!" The general took up his syphon to carry it back to the case in the pantry. "He's 'a dear,' is he? Amelia, John Saxton weighs at least one hundred and eighty pounds. I don't believe I'd call him 'a dear.' I'd reserve that for slim, elderly persons like me, or young girls just out of school." He stood swinging the syphon at arm's length. "Now, if my advice were worth anything, I'd tell you to let these young people alone. If you've guessed the true inwardness of this matter—as you probably haven't—they'll come out all right."

"Of course they'll come out all right," she answered, dreamily. The swinging door in the dining-room fanned

upon her answer as the general strode through into the pantry.

For several weeks following Mrs. Whipple continued to think of Evelyn and her affairs. Evelyn was not an object of pity, and yet there was a certain pathos about her. Her position in the town as the daughter of its wealthiest citizen isolated her, it seemed to Mrs. Whipple. A girl would be less than human if the experiences to which Evelyn had been subjected did not make a profound impression upon her. Mrs. Whipple had seen a good deal of trouble in her day. She felt that Evelyn had learned too much of life in one lesson; if she could ease the future for her, she wished to do it. With such hopes as these she occupied herself as spring waxed old and summer held the land.

CHAPTER XL

SHIFTED BURDENS

Porter insisted that Margrave should not have the Traction Company at any price, though the general manager of the Transcontinental was persistent in his offers. As Margrave did not care to deal with Porter, who was not, he complained, "an easy trader," he negotiated with Fenton and Saxton. After several weeks of ineffectual effort he concluded that Fenton and Saxton were almost as difficult. He called Saxton a "stubborn brute" to Saxton's face; but offered to continue him in a responsible position with the company if he would help him with the purchase. He still wanted to control the company for political reasons, but there was also the fact of his having invested the money of several of his friends in the Transcontinental directorate, prior to the last annual meeting.

These gentlemen had begun to inquire in a respectful way when Margrave was going to effect the *coup* which, he had been assuring them, he had planned. They had, they were aware, no rights as against the bondholders; and as Margrave understood this perfectly well, he was very anxious to buy in the property at receiver's sale for an amount that would satisfy Porter and his allies, and give him a chance to "square himself," as he

put it. This required additional money, but he was able to command it from his "people," for the receiver had demonstrated that the property could be made to pay. While these negotiations were pending, Saxton and Fenton were able to satisfy their curiosity as to the relations which had existed between Wheaton and Margrave. Margrave had no shame in confessing just what had passed between them; he viewed it all as a joke, and explained, without compunction, exactly the manner in which he had come by the shares which had belonged to Evelyn Porter and James Wheaton.

When Saxton came back from Colorado, Porter was ill again, and Fenton was seriously disposed to accept a price which Margrave's syndicate had offered. Margrave's position had grown uncomfortable; he had to get himself and "his people" out of a scrape at any cost. His plight pleased Fenton, who tried to make Porter see the irony of it; and this view of it, as much as the high offer, finally prevailed upon him. He saw at last the futility of securing and managing the property for himself; his health had become a matter of concern, and Fenton insisted that a street railway company would prove no easier to manage than a bank.

Porter was, as John had said, "a peculiar brick," and after the final orders of the court had been made, and Saxton's fees allowed, Porter sent him a check for five thousand dollars, without comment. Fenton made him keep it; Porter had done well in Traction and he owed much to John; but John protested that he preferred being thanked to being tipped; but the lawyer persuaded him at last that the idiosyncrasies of the rich ought to be respected.

Porter felt his burdens slipping from him with unexpected satisfaction. He grew jaunty in his old way as he chid his contemporaries and friends for holding on; as for himself, he told them, he intended "to die rested," and he adjusted his affairs so that they would give him little trouble in the future. The cottage which he had bought on the North Shore was a place they had all admired the previous summer. Porter had liked it because there was enough ground to afford the lawn and flower beds which he cultivated with so much satisfaction at home. The place was called "Red Gables," and Porter had bought it with its furniture, so that there was little to do in taking possession but to move in. The Whipples were their first guests, going to them in mid-July, when they were fully installed.

The elder Bostonians whom Porter had met the previous summer promptly renewed their acquaintance with him. He had attained, in their eyes, a new dignity in becoming a cottager. The previous owner of "Red Gables" had lately failed in business and they found in the advent of the Porters a sign of the replenishing of the East from the West, which interested them philosophically. Porter lacked their own repose, but they liked to hear him talk. He was amusing and interesting, and they had already found his prophecies concerning the markets trustworthy. The ladies of their families heard with horror his views on the Indian question, which were not romantic, nor touched with the spirit of Boston philanthropy; but his daughter was lovely, they said, and her accent was wholly inoffensive.

So the Porters were well received, and Evelyn was glad to find her father accepting his new leisure so complacently. She and Mrs. Whipple agreed that he and the general were as handsome and interesting as any of the elderly Bostonians among their neighbors; and they undoubtedly were so.

CHAPTER XLI

RETROSPECTIVE VANITY

John Saxton sat in the office of the Traction Company on a hot night in July. Fenton had just left him. The transfer to the Margrave syndicate had been effected and John would no more sign himself "John Saxton, Receiver." His work in Clarkson was at an end. The Neponset Trust Company had called him to Boston for a conference, which meant, he knew, a termination of his service with them. He had lately sold the Poindexter ranch, and so little property remained on the Neponset's books that it could be cared for from the home office. He had not opened the afternoon mail. He picked up a letter from the top of the pile and read:

SAN FRANCISCO, July 10, 189—.

My Dear Sir:

I hesitate about writing you, but there are some things which I should like you to understand before I go away. I had fully expected to remain with you and Bishop Delafield and to return to Clarkson that last morning at Poindexter's. I cannot defend myself for having run away; it must have seemed a strange thing to you that I did so. I had fully intended acting on the bishop's advice, which I knew then, and know now, was good. But when the west-bound train came, my courage left me; I could not go back and face the people I had known, after what had happened. I told

you the truth there in the ranch house that night; every word of it was true. Maybe I did not make it clear enough how weak I am. I do not know why God made me so; I know that I tried to fight it; but I was vain and foolish. Things came too easy for me, I guess; at any rate I was never worthy of the good fortune that befell me. It seemed to me that for two years everything I did was a mistake. I suppose if I had been a real criminal, and not merely a coward, I should not have entangled myself as I did and brought calamity upon other people.

When I reached here, I found employment with a shipping house. I have told my story to one of the firm, who has been kind to me. He seems to understand my case, and is giving me a good chance to begin over again. I suppose the worst possible things have been said about me, and I do not care, except that I hope the people in Clarkson will not think I was guilty of any wrong-doing at the bank. I read in the newspapers that I had stolen the bank's money, and I hope that was corrected. The books must have proved what I say. I understand now that what I did was worse than stealing, but I should like you and Mr. Porter to know that I not only did not take other people's money, but that in my foolish relations with Margrave I did not receive a cent for the shares of stock which he took from me—neither for my own nor for those of Miss Porter. I don't blame Margrave; if I had not been a coward he could not have played with me as he did.

The company is sending me to one of its South American houses. I go by steamer to-morrow, and you will not hear from me again. I should like you to know that I have neither seen nor heard anything of my brother since that night. With best wishes for your own happiness and prosperity,

Yours sincerely,

JAMES WHEATON.

JOHN SAXTON, ESQ.

On his way home to the club Saxton stopped at Bishop Delafield's rooms, and found the bishop, as usual, preparing for flight. Time did not change Bishop Delafield. He was one of those men who reach sixty, and never, apparently, pass it. He and Saxton were fast friends now. The bishop missed Warry out of his life; Warry was always so accessible and so cheering. John Saxton was not so accessible and he had not Warry's lightness, but the Bishop of Clarkson liked John Saxton!

The bishop sat with his inevitable hand-baggage by his side and read Wheaton's letter through.

"How ignorant we are!" he said, folding it. "I sometimes think that we who try to minister to the needs of the poor in spirit do not even know the rudiments of our trade. We are pretty helpless with men like Wheaton. They are apparently strong; they yield to no temptations, so far as any man knows; they are exemplary characters. I suppose that they are living little tragedies all the time. The moral coward is more to be pitied than the open criminal. You know where to find the criminal; but the moral coward is an unknown quantity. Life is a strange business, John, and the older I get the less I think I know of it." He sighed and handed back the letter.

"But he's doing better than we might have expected him to," said Saxton. "A man's entitled to happiness if he can find it. He undoubtedly chose the easier part in running away. I can't imagine him coming back here to face the community after all that had happened."

"I don't know that I can either. Preaching is easier

than practising, and I'm not sure that I gave him the best advice at the ranch house that morning."

"Well, it was the only thing to do," Saxton answered. "I suppose neither you nor I was sure he told the truth; it was a situation that was calculated to make one skeptical. It isn't clear from his letter that the whole thing has impressed him in any great way. He's anxious to have us think well of him—a kind of retrospective vanity."

"But his punishment is great. It's not for us to pass on its adequacy. I must be going, John," and Saxton gathered up the battered cases and went out to the car with him.

Bishop Delafield always brought Warry back vividly to John, and as they waited on the corner he remembered his first meeting with the bishop, in Warry's rooms at The Bachelors'. And that was very long ago!

CHAPTER XLII

AT THE PARTING OF THE WAYS

Uncertainty and doubt now filled John Saxton's mind and heart, and he saw no light ahead. He had seen Evelyn several times before she left home, on occasions when he went to the house with Fenton for conferences with her father. He had intended saying good by to her, but the Porters went hurriedly at last and he was not sorry; it was easier that way. But Mrs. Whipple, who was exercising a motherly supervision over John, had exacted a promise from him to come to Orchard Lane during the time that she and the general were to be with the Porters in their new cottage. When he went East, Saxton settled down at his club in Boston, and pretended that it was good to be at home again; but he went about with homesickness gnawing his heart. He had reason to be happy and satisfied with himself. He had practically concluded the difficult work which he had been sent to Clarkson to do; he had realized more money from their assets than the officers of the trust company had expected; and they held out to him the promise of employment in their Boston office as a reward. So he walked the familiar streets planning his future anew. He had succeeded in something at last, and he would stay

in Boston, having, he told himself, earned the right to live there. The assistant secretaryship of the trust company, which had been mentioned to him, would be a position of dignity and promise. He had never hoped to do so well. Moreover, it would be pleasant to be near his sister, who lived at Worcester. There were only the two of them, and they ought to live near together.

It is, however, an unpleasant habit of the fates never to suffer us to debate simple problems long; they must throw in new elements to puzzle us. While he deferred going to Orchard Lane a new perplexity confronted him. One of Margrave's "people" came from New York as the representative of the syndicate that had purchased the Clarkson Traction Company, and sought an interview. John had met this gentleman at the time the sale was closed; he was a person of consequence in the financial world, who came quickly to the point of his errand. He offered John the position of general manager of the company.

Margrave, it appeared, was not to have full swing after all. He was to be president, but John's visitor intimated broadly that the position was to be largely honorary. They had looked into the matter thoroughly in New York and were anxious that the policy and methods of the receivership should continue. Mr. Margrave was an invaluable man, said the New Yorker, but his duties with the railroad company had so multiplied that he would be unable to give the necessary care to the street car management. John should have absolute authority. The syndicate would be greatly disappointed if he declined. A salary was named which

was larger than John had ever dreamed of receiving in any occupation; and they wished an answer within a few days. John Saxton was human, and it was not easy to decline a salary of six thousand dollars for services which he knew he could perform, offered to him by a gentleman whom people were not in the habit of refusing. He remained indoors at the club all day, smoking many pipes in a fruitless effort to reconcile his resolves with his new problems.

The next day he thought he saw it all more clearly. Perhaps, he reflected, life in Boston would become endurable; there was his sister to consider, and he owed something to her; she was all he had. He went out and walked aimlessly through the hot streets, little heeding what he did. He realized presently that he had gone into a railway office and asked for a suburban time table. He carried this back to the club, where the atmosphere of his cool, quiet room soothed him; and he lay down on a couch and studied the list of Orchard Lane trains. He found that he could run out almost any hour of the day. He slept and woke refreshed, with the time table still grasped in his hand. He had been very foolish, he concluded; it would be a simple matter to go out to Orchard Lane to call on the Porters and Whipples, and he picked out one of the afternoon trains and marked it on the folder with a lead pencil. He spent the evening writing letters,—in particular a letter to the representative of the Clarkson Traction syndicate, declining the general managership; and the next afternoon when he went up to Orchard Lane he carried the letter sealed and stamped in his pocket, as a kind of talisman that would assure his safety.

It suited his righteous mood that he should find no one at home at Red Gables but Mr. Porter, who played golf all the morning and slept and experimented at landscape gardening all the afternoon. He welcomed John with unwonted cordiality, in the inexplicable way people have of being friendlier with a fellow townsman away from their common habitat than at home. He led the way to a cool and cozy corner of the broad veranda, where Japanese screens made a pleasant nook. The afternoon sea shimmered beyond the trees; the lawn was tended with urban care. Porter was very proud of the place and listened with approval to John's praise of it.

"Well, sir; it's cooler than Clarkson."

"A trifle, yes; the efforts of the Clarkson papers to make a summer resort of the town were never very successful." John's eyes rested on a wicker table where there were books and a little sewing basket, which it wrung his heart to see.

"Folks are all off somewhere. The Whipples are in town. Grant's gone sailing and Evelyn's out visiting or attending a push of some kind up the shore. But I guess I know when I've got a good thing. You don't catch me gadding into town when I've got a cool place to sit." He stretched his short legs comfortably. "I hope you'll smoke a cigar if you've got one. They've cut mine off, and Evelyn won't let me keep any around; thinks they'd be too much of a temptation."

"It's just as well to keep away from temptation," said John, not thinking of cigars. The sight of Porter and the mention of Clarkson brought his homesickness to an acute stage.

"I suppose our old friend Margrave's enjoying himself running the Traction Company by this time," continued Porter. "Well, sir; I guess he can have it. I thought for a while that I wanted it myself, but Fenton talked me out of it. It will pay, if they run it right; yes, sir; it's a good thing. But the trouble with Margrave is that he won't play square. It ain't in him. He's so crooked that they'll never find a coffin for him, —no, sir; not in stock; I guess it'll tax the manufacturer to his full capacity to fit Tim. But he seems to have those Transcontinental people on the string, and they're smart fellows, too. I reckon Margrave's a handy man for them. They used to say *I* was crooked,"— he twirled his straw hat, and changed the position of his legs; "but I guess that for pure sinuosity I was never in Tim Margrave's class. Well, Tim's a good enough fellow when all's said and done!"

"They say of him that he always stands by his friends," said John. "And that's a good deal."

"That's right. It's a whole lot," Porter assented.

There were some details connected with the final transfer of the Traction Company to Margrave's syndicate which Porter had not fully understood, or which Fenton had purposely kept from him; and he pressed John for new light on these matters. John answered or parried as he thought wisest. He was surprised to find how completely Porter had freed himself from business; the sometime banker talked of Clarkson affairs with an accentuation of the past tense, as if to wave them all away as far as possible. Events in themselves did not interest him particularly; but he took a mildly patronizing tone in philosophizing about them.

He drew from John the fact that most of the property of the Neponset Trust Company in the Trans-Missouri region had been sold.

"That's good. I guess you've done pretty well for them, Saxton. But I hope we shan't lose you from Clarkson. We need young men out there; and I guess we've got as good a town as there is anywhere west of Chicago."

"I'm sure of that," said John; and he rose to go.

"I'm sorry the rest of them are not here," said Mr. Porter. "Evelyn ought to have been home before this. But you must come again. Come out and try the golf course and have dinner with us any time. I'm playing a little myself this summer. Evelyn and Grant can outdrive me all right; but they're not in it with me on putting. I'm one of the warmest putters on the links. You can find the shore path this way." He led John to an exit at the rear of the house, where there was an old apple orchard. "After you pass the lighthouse you come to a road that leads right into the village."

John left his greetings for the rest of the household and turned away. It had all happened much more easily than he had expected. He had burned all his bridges behind him now; he would mail his letter in the village; not that it would be delivered any sooner, but because it fell in with his spirit of renunciation that it should go hence with the Orchard Lane postmark.

He took it from his pocket and carried it in his hand. He found the walk very pleasant, with the rough shore of the bay on one hand and pretty villas on the other. Orchard Lane was not wholly a fiction of

nomenclature. There were veritable lanes that survived the coming of fashion and wealth, and spoke of simpler times on these northern shores. The path was not altogether straight, but described a tortuous line past the lighthouse which crouched on a point of the bay. There was a train at six o'clock; it was now five and he loitered along, stopping often to look out upon the sea. A group of people was gathered about a tea table on the sloping lawn in front of one of the houses. The colors of the women's dresses were bright against the dark green. It was a gay company; their laughter floated out to him mockingly. He wondered whether Evelyn was there, as he passed on, beating the rocky path with his stick.

Evelyn was not there; but her destination was that particular lawn and its tea table. Turning a fresh bend in the path he came upon her. He had had no thought of seeing her; yet she was coming down the path toward him, her picture hat framed in the dome of a blue parasol. He had renounced her for all time, and he should greet her guardedly; but the blood was singing in his temples and throbbing in his finger tips at the sight of her.

"This is too bad!" she exclaimed, as they met. "I hope you can come back to the house."

She walked straight up to him and gave him her hand in her quick, frank way.

"I'm sorry, but I must go in to town on this next train," he answered. He turned in the path and walked along beside her.

"This happened to be one of our scattering days, for all except father."

"We had a nice talk, he and I. Your place is charming."

They descended the shore path until they came to the villa where the tea drinkers were assembled.

"Don't let me detain you. I'm sure you were going to join these lotus eaters."

"I don't believe they need me," she answered, evasively. "They seem pretty busy. But if you're hungry—or thirsty, I can get something for you there." They passed the gate, walking slowly along. He knew that he ought to urge her to stop, and that he must hurry on to catch his train; but it was too sweet to be near her; this was the last time and it was his own!

"I seem to remember your tea drinking ways," she said. "You use only sugar and the hot water."

"But that was in the winter," he responded. He wished she had not referred to that afternoon, when he had been weak, just as he was proving weak now. A yacht was steaming slowly into the bay. It was a pretty, white plaything and they paused and commended its good qualities with the easy certainty of superficial knowledge. They walked on, passing the lighthouse, and slowly nearing the entrance to Red Gables. She led the talk easily and her light-heartedness added to his depression; every step he took was an error; but he would leave her at the gate when they came to it and go on to the village and his train. She paused abruptly and looked across a meadow which lay between them and the Red Gables orchard.

"I really believe it's a cow; yes, it is a cow," she declared, with quiet conviction.

"I thought it was a yacht. Was I as dull as that?" he demanded.

"Be it far from me to say; but I was getting a little breathless. Even the professional monologuists in the vaudeville have to rest."

He was not in a humor for frivolous conversation; but she had never been so gay. He had committed himself to general chaos and yet she was smiling amid the ruin of the world.

"I don't believe there are any letter boxes along here," she continued, looking straight ahead. He remembered his letter; he was stupidly carrying it in his hand; his fingers were cramped from their clutch upon it. It was not easy to resist her mood, and he now laughed in spite of himself.

"I'm disappointed. I thought they had all the necessities of a successful summer resort here,—even mails."

"Rather poor, don't you think? I suppose you were carrying the letter to get an opening for that."

They paused and John held open the little gate in the stone wall. He was grave again, and something of his seriousness communicated itself to her. Clearly, he thought, this was the parting of the ways. He had not relaxed his hold upon the letter; it was a straw at which he clutched for support.

"Won't you come in? There are plenty of trains and we'd like you to dine with us."

A great wave of loneliness and yearning swept over him. Her invitation seemed to create new and limitless distances that stretched between them. In fumbling with the latch of the gate he had dropped his letter. The wind caught and carried it out into the grass.

He went soberly after it and picked it up. There was a dogged resignation in his step as he walked slowly across the grass. While he was securing the bit of paper, she sat down on a rustic bench and waited for him.

"The fates don't agree with you about the letter, Mr. Saxton. You were looking for a letter box and they tried to thwart you."

"I'm not superstitious," said John, smiling a little.

"One needn't be,—to act on the direct hints of Providence."

She sat at comfortable ease on the bench, holding her parasol across her lap. There was room for two, and John sat down.

"Suppose it were a check on an overdrawn account; would Providence intervene to prevent an overdraft?"

"That's a commercial hypothesis; I think we should be above such considerations." Then they were silent. John bent forward with his elbows on his knees, playing with his stick and still holding the letter. The wind came up out of the sea and blew in their faces. The brass mountings of the yacht shone resplendent in the slanting rays of the lowering sun. It was very calm and restful in the orchard. Two robins came and inspected them, and then flew away to one of the gnarled old trees to gossip about them.

"It happens to be important," said John, indicating the letter.

"Oh, pardon me!" with real contrition. It was not her way to flirt with a young man over a letter. John held up the envelope so that she saw the superscription. She knew the name very well. It was constantly in

the newspapers, and the owner of it had dined once at her father's house.

"He's the head of the syndicate that has bought the Traction Company. He has asked me to stay in Clarkson and run the street cars."

"That's very nice. But merit gets rewarded sometimes."

"But I have refused the offer," he said quietly. He had not intended to tell her; but it was doubtless just as well; and it would alter nothing. "My work in Clarkson is finished," he went on. "Warry's affairs will make it necessary for me to go back from time to time, but it will not be home again."

"I'm sorry," she said. "I thought you were to be of us. But I suppose there is a greater difference between the East and the West than any one can understand who has not known both." They regarded each other gravely, as if this were, of course, the whole matter at issue.

"I can't go back,—it's too much; I can't do it," he said wearily.

"I know how it must be,—this last year and Warry! It was all so terrible—for all of us." She was looking away; the wind had freshened; the yacht's pennant stood out against the blue sky.

John rose and looked down at her. It was natural that she should include herself with him in a common grief for the man who had been his friend and whom she had loved. She had always been kind to him; her kindness stung him now, for he knew that it was because of Warry; and a resolve woke in him suddenly.

He would not suffer her kindness under a false pretense; he could at least be honest with her.

"I can't go back, because he is not there; and because—because you are there! You don't know,—you should never know, but I was disloyal to Warry from the first. I let him talk to me from day to day of you; I let him tell me that he loved you; I never let him know—I never meant any one to know—" He ceased speaking; she was very still and did not look at him. "It was base of me," he went on. "I would gladly have died for him if he had lived; but now that he is dead I can betray him. I hate myself worse than you can hate me. I know how I must wound and shock you—"

"Oh, no!" she moaned.

But he went on; he would spare himself nothing.

"It is hideous—it was cowardly of me to come here." His hands were clenched and his face twitched with pain. "Oh, if he had lived! If he had lived!"

She rose now and looked at him with an infinite pity. This is one of God's unreckoned gifts to man,—the gift of pity that He has made the great secret of a woman's eyes. Evelyn's were gray now, like the stretch of sea beyond her, where a mist was creeping shoreward over the blue water.

"If he had lived," she said very softly, looking away through the sun-dappled aisles of the orchard, "if he had lived—it would have been the same, John."

But he did not understand. His name as she spoke it rang strange in his ears. The letter had fallen to the ground and lay in the grass between them; he half stooped to pick it up, not knowing what he did.

She walked away through the orchard path, which suddenly became to him a path of gold that stretched into paradise; and he sprang after her with a great fear in his heart lest some barrier might descend and shut her out forever.

"Evelyn! Evelyn!"

It was not a voice that called her; it was a spirit, long held in thrall, that had shaken free and become a name.

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